

Experimental Writing

Africa Vs Latin America

Literatura Experimental

África vs América Latina

Volume 1/ Volumen 1



EDITED BY

Tendai Rinos Mwanaka &
Ricardo Felix Rodriguez

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Contributors Bio Notes/ Notas Biograficas De Los Autores

Abu-yaman Abdulrahman M. grew up in western Nigeria (Lagos) and currently resides in the north (Minna). A graduate of IBB University Lapai, Niger state with a major in Economics. He loves to draw in portraits in pencil monochrome and also an amateur fashion designer. He is into sports and follows Chelsea FC, Usain Bolt and Roger Federer. His poems are forthcoming in *Kalahari Review*, *Black boy reviews* and *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*

Ajise Vincent is a Nigerian Poet. His poem “Song of a Progeny” was a shortlisted poem at the Korea-Nigeria Poetry feast, 2015. His works have been published in *Best New African Poets 2015 Anthology*, *London-grip magazine*, *Eureka*, *Kalahari Review*, *Sakonfa literary Magazine*, *Synchronized chaos*, *AfricanWriter*, *Indian periodical*, *Jalada Africa*, *Black boy review*, *PIN Quarterly Journal*, *1947 Journal*, *Prachya Review*, *ANA Review*, *Oddball*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Harbinger Asylum* and various literary outlets. He writes from Lagos, Nigeria.

Alvarado Javier- (Santiago de Veraguas 28 de agosto de 1982). Hizo sus estudios en el colegio Panama School y después obtiene el título de Licenciado en Lengua y Literatura Españolas por la Universidad de Panamá en el año 2005. Candidato al Master en Bellas Artes en Teatro por la Universidad de Panamá. Ha dado lecturas de sus poemas en Cuba, Chile, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, México, Inglaterra, Guatemala, El Salvador, Escocia, Colombia, Quebec, Canadá, Argentina y Uruguay; así como también la aparición de sus poemas en varias antologías de Poesía Hispanoamericana.

Amreyan Erhu: I am from Nigeria. I'm a member of the Africa Book Club and one of my short stories has been published on *BrittlePaper*. I love anime and writing speculative fiction because I strongly believe African mythology and religions should be deeply explored

Archubi Claudio. Mar del Plata (1971). Doctor en Física. Trabaja en el Instituto de Astronomía y Física del Espacio y es docente de la UBA. Colabora con revistas literarias del país y del exterior. Ha participado en varios festivales internacionales de poesía. Mención única de honor en el concurso de poesía de la editorial Ruinas

Circulares (2012) y menciones en cuento y poesía (2014). Publicó **“La forma del agua”** (ed. de la Universidad de La Plata, 2010), **“Siete maneras de decir tristeza”** (Lima, 2011), **“Sísifo en el Norte”** (ed. Ruinas Circulares, Buenos Aires, 2012), **“La casa sin sombra”** (Buenos Aires, 2014), **“La ciudad vacía”** (ed. Trópico Sur, Uruguay, 2015).

Archubi Claudio. Mar del Plata (1971). Doctor in Physics. He works at the Institute of Astronomy and Space Physics and teaches at the UBA. He collaborates with literary magazines in the country and abroad. He has participated in several international poetry festivals. Honorable unique mention in the poetry contest from the publisher Ruinas Circulares (2012) and mentions in stories and poetry (2014). He published **“The shape of water”** (ed. Universidad de La Plata, 2010), **“Seven ways to say sadness”** (Lima, 2011), **“Sisyphus in the North”** (ed. Ruinas Circulares, Buenos Aires, 2012) **“The house without shadow”** (Buenos Aires, 2014), **“The empty city”** (ed. Trópico Sur, Uruguay, 2015).

Berenguer Carmen: En el año 1983 publiqué mi primer libro, Bobby Sands Desfallece en el Muro. El golpe de Estado de 1973 produjo un quiebre institucional político social y cultural y al espacio literario, la imagen de la quema de libros, persecución y tortura, censura previa, autores desaparecidos, exilios y censura sospecha y delación. Había que pedir autorización del Ministerio del Interior para publicar un libro. El sistema editorial para un autor desconocido era imposible. Yo me encontraba en la Sociedad de Escritores de Chile fue un refugio donde se generó un espacio de libertad y el comienzo de publicaciones literarias revistas trípticos que dieron lugar a que yo tomara la iniciativa de aprender a hacerme un libro este libro.

Bhabha Nabeela is a 17 year old poet from Durban, South Africa and an established writer for a creative arts/news blog based in Mexico, www.truthnetmedia.com/thepoeticalarsonist. “I also have a fan base on Instagram where I showcase most of my poetry. I go by the Pseudonym *The Arsonist* in all my works. Most of my writing consists of abstract poetry, news-related articles, current affairs and inspirational pieces. I have been writing ever since I could remember and writing, for me, is a way of life.”

Bourgeois Louis is the Executive Director of VOX PRESS, a 501 (c) 3 organization based in Oxford, Mississippi. He also does creative writing and philosophy for the Prison Writes Institute, a liberal arts program for Mississippi inmates. His *Collected Works* will be released in 2017 by Xenos Press.

Cambaza Edgar a.k.a *Jorge d'Amizade* is Mozambican, born in Maputo City. First, his passion was comics. He published for a short time in *Viva! Magazine*. He is lecturer of Applied Biology at Eduardo Mondlane University and got his Master's of Food Science in Australia. Now he is doing PhD studies in Japan. He writes poems in his free time, mostly motivational, focused on freedom of expression and harmony among people.

Gustavo Campos (San Pedro Sula, 1984), Poeta, narrador y ensayista. Ha publicado los libros *Habitaciones sordas* (Guatemala, 2005); *Desde el hospicio* (HN, 2008); *Los inacabados* (HN, 2010); *Katastrofé* (HN, 2012); *Entre el parnaso y la maison*. Muestra de la nueva narrativa sampedrana (HN, 2011); *Cuarta dimensión de la tarde*. Antología de poetas hondureños y cubanos (Coedición, HN, 2011). 3er y 2do lugar en el “**Premio Nacional Europeo Hibuera**”: en relato con *Los Inacabados* (2006) y en poesía con *Tríptico del iris de narciso* (2013), respectivamente, patrocinado por las Embajadas de Francia, España, Italia, Alemania y la Delegación de la Unión Europea en Honduras. Representante estudiantil en el Festival Interuniversitario Centroamericano de Cultura y las Artes “**FICCUA**”: Nicaragua, 2007; Panamá, 2011.

Celestino Sóira was born in São Paulo, Brazil. She is a member of the Brazilian/Swiss Academy of Letters and her stories and poems were published in Brazil and abroad.

Egboluche Yugo Gabriel was born in Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria and hails from the Ibo speaking tribe of Eastern Nigeria. He was inspired by his elder brother to venture into writing. The inspired Gabriel continued with his writing as much as his academic pursuit let him - writing stories for movie adaptation and spearheading numerous editorial boards. His writing genre covers fiction, poetry, business and copy-writing. Although budding, his works have been published in national dailies, magazines and on-line webzines. He is currently resident in Nigeria where he works as a Development Practitioner. He enjoys traveling and creative writing.

Pedro Arturo Estrada – Colombia -1956. Ha publicado *Poemas en blanco y negro* (Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 1994); *Fatum* (Colección Autores Antioqueños, 2000); *Oscura edad y otros poemas* (Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2006); *Suma del tiempo* (Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2009); *Des/historias* (Cuadernos Negros Editorial, 2012); *Poemas de Otra/parte* (Cuadernos Negros Editorial, 2012); *Locus Solus* (Sílaba Editores, 2013); *Blanco y Negro, nueva selección de textos* (Letera Ediciones, NY, 2014) y *Monodia* (Letera Ediciones, NY, 2015). Es premio nacional *Ciro Mendía* en 2004, *Sueños de Luciano Pulgar* en 2007, *Beca de creación Alcaldía de Medellín*, 2012 y *Casa Silva*, 2013, entre otros. También ha participado en distintos festivales y encuentros de poesía en Colombia y E.U. Ha sido coordinador de talleres literarios con el ministerio de cultura y algunas instituciones educativas del país.

Ezeigwe Kelechukwu is a poet. He lives in Lagos. His works have been published in *The Muse Journal* of the Department of English, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He was recently published in *Best 'New' African Poets 2015 Anthology*.

Flores Héctor (Chaco de la Pitoreta) nació en Honduras en 1976. Publicó el poemario *Versos para leer desde las Trincheras* (Editorial Casa San Ignacio, 2012). La sistematización de la investigación *Fe y Alegría: Entre las y los Tolupanes* (Editorial Casa San Ignacio, 2013). El libro de la *Opción a la Acción sobre Fe y Alegría Honduras* (2014) Es coautor de la investigación *Maras y pandillas en Centro América* (2005), publicada por las universidades de la Compañía de Jesús en Centro América, coautor de la obra *Derecho penal y sistema penitenciario en Honduras* (2006), publicado por el Equipo de Reflexión Investigación y Comunicación de la Compañía de Jesús. Es parte de la antología *Poesía Centro Americana Comprometida* en las revistas online *Otro Lunes* en su edición 29 (octubre de 2013), en revista *Ombligo* un fragmento de *Sin Tiempo ni Distancia* (2014) y en la antología *Poemas por Palestina* editado en solidaridad para con las mujeres palestinas.

George Abigail, Pushcart Prize nominee for her fiction, is a feminist writer and a fulltime poet. She has written for *Modern Diplomacy* and contributed bimonthly for a year (2014-2015) to a symposium for the *Ovi Magazine: Finland's English Online Magazine*. She briefly studied film. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Birds Piled Loosely*, *Every Day Poems*, *Literary Orphans*, and is forthcoming from *Toad*

Suck Review. She blogs at Goodreads. She is the recipient of writing grants from the Eastern Cape Provincial Arts and Culture Council, the National Arts Council in Johannesburg, and The Centre for the Book in Cape Town.

Grant-Oyeye Lind, an award winning poet was born in Nigeria, Africa . She has published work in several international literary magazines such as: Sentinell UK, E-fiction India, Blue Bonnet USA, Periphery, USA, Paper wasp, Australia, Sub-saharan Magazine. Her poem *bear necessities* formed part of an anthology of top poems, 2015-Polar bear expressions Canada. She won the UHRSN international human rights poetry award for her poem “m-moments”. She contributed to the University of Birmingham sponsored project on the cultural aspect of the Greek economic crisis project via poetry.

Gumeta Chary (María del Rosario Velázquez Gumeta) Chiapas, México 1962. Reconoce que la cultura es un derecho de la humanidad y que ésta debe llegar a todos. Como promotora cultural promueve a través de exposiciones y Festivales el arte y la literatura. Ha publicado varios libros de poesía y de investigación histórica regional. Sus últimas publicaciones son “MAS ALLA DEL SUR” La Jardinera Guarrior Ediciones 2014; “...Y LOS MUERTOS MARCELA?” Editorial PublicPervert 2015; “POEMAS MUY VIOLETAS” EDITORIAL Metáfora, Guatemala, C.A. “JOAQUIN MIGUEL GUTIERREZ CANALES: SINTESIS BIOGRAFICA” ITAC-CONACULTA 2015. Su poesía ha sido seleccionada en antologías de México, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Perú, Estados Unidos y España; y traducida al inglés y al zoque.

Stacy Hardy is an editor at the pan African journal *Chimurenga* and a teacher in Rhodes University's MA in Creative Writing Programme in Grahamstown, South Africa. Her writing has appeared in a wide range of publications, and several of her short stories have been published in books, literary anthologies and catalogues. An opera libretto written in collaboration with poet Lesego Rampolokeng and based on Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* was published by Botsotso Publishing in 2013. Her short film *I Love You Jet Li*, created with Jaco Bouwer was awarded Best Experimental Film at the Festival Chileno Internacional Del Cortometraje De Santiago 2006 and included on the Influx 2010 DVD (Lowave, France). She has participated in numerous exhibitions around the world and is working on an ongoing series of multimedia works in collaboration

with Angolan composer, performer and instrument designer Victor Gama. An anthology of her fiction, *Because the Night* was recently published by Pocko Books, London.

Shannon Hopkins: I am a journalist, editor and writer living in Ballito on the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast of South Africa. I hold a BA degree in Fine Art and English, and am currently studying for my Honours in English Literature at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. I am passionate about the written word in all its forms, and especially how the human experience, with all its joys and sorrows, can be explored through story writing.

Iyeomoan Ehi'zogie is a poetry laureate of the Korean Cultural Centre, Nigeria. He's a poetry fellow of the Goree Institute of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, and a Castello Di Duino literary scholar of the University of Trieste, Italy. His works have appeared in publications the world over. Two poems of his received Pushcart nominations in the fall of 2015. He's currently working on his poetry volume and at the moment scouts for a serene Writer's space to complete same. He tweets @fulanibuoy on Twitter.

Murvin Andino Jiménez: Poeta, narrador, editor, investigador literario, Licenciado en Letras con orientación en Literatura por la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras en el Valle de Sula. Ha publicado los libros de poesía *Corral de locos* (San Pedro Sula, 2009), *Extranjero*. (San Pedro Sula, 2011), *La isla dividida* (SPS, 2015) y *La estación tardía* (SPS, 2015, versión electrónica). Ha sido antologado en los libros "Muestra poética. Los novísimos" (Guaymuras, 2002). "Cuarta dimensión de la tarde. Antología de poetas hondureños y cubanos", (San Pedro Sula/ Holguín, Cuba, 2010), "Apresurada Cicatriz", México, 2013. Es catedrático universitario de Curula - Unah. De mi libro "La isla dividida"

JoPro Blog: Bound together by one common experience, three CA (SA)s write about what affects them (and you) the most: Joburg, Business and Politics. Well versed in all three spheres, they bring you thought provocation, challenges to your mindset and general young professional banter.

Kagira-Kargbo M. Baraka is a standard 5 pupil from Kenya aged 11 years old. He started writing when he was 6 years old. Some of his poetry collection he wrote between the ages of 7 and 9 years were

published in September 2015 in a book entitled *Poems for Primary School Children*. He is working on book two and three of the poems. Baraka's dream is to become a renowned writer as he aspires to inspire other children to dare the world of writing.

Kasese Lydia Nyachiro is a writer, of fiction and non-fiction works as well as a media planner. Her first ever collection of short poetry was published earlier this year as a part of the *New-Generation African Poets: A Chapbook Box Set*. Her other works have appeared in literary websites as well as having been longlisted and shortlisted in literary awards such as Writivism and BNPA poetry competition.

Kolawole Samuel was born and raised in Nigeria. He authored the story collection *The Book of M* in 2011. Awards include a Norman Mailer Fiction Fellowship, a Prince Claus Award, an honorary fellowship in Writing from the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa and writing residencies from Wellstone Centre in the Redwoods California, and Island Institute, Alaska. He is a graduate of the noted Clarion West Writers Workshop in Seattle, Washington. He recently completed his second book and he is working on a novel. Samuel is studying towards an MA in Creative Writing at Rhodes University, South Africa

Krueger Anton: Books include *Sunnyside Sal* (2010), *Experiments in Freedom: Issues of Identity in New South African Drama* (2010), *Shaggy* (with Pravasan Pillay, 2011) and *Everyday Anomalies* (2011). Krueger's plays have been performed in eight countries and have been nominated for numerous awards in South Africa, including the FNBVTA and the Olive Schreiner. He was a runner up for the Dalro Poetry prize for 2010 and *Experiments in Freedom* won the Rhodes Vice Chancellor's Book award, while his Afrikaans play *Altyd* was shortlisted for the RSG radio drama prize and broadcast in 2013.

Luna Leticia (Ciudad de México, 1965) Poeta escénica, ensayista y editora. Libros: *Hora lunar* (1999), *Desde el oasis* (2000), *El amante y la espiga* (2005), *Los días beridos* (400 Elefantes, Nicaragua, 2007/ Premio Internacional Casa de Poesía "Moradalsur", Los Ángeles, CA, 2008), *Wounded days and other poems* (Unopress, University New Orleans, 2010) y *Espiral de agua* (español-portugués, 2013), obra suya también ha sido traducida al catalán y polaco. Dirige el grupo Fuego Azul (Poesía, Música y Danza). Ha compilado las antologías: *Trilogía Poética de las Mujeres en Hispanoamérica* (pícaras, místicas y rebeldes, 2004) y *Cinco*

siglos de poesía femenina en México (2011). En 2013 realizó la Residencia Artística-Letras-Granada, España, con el apoyo del Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, de México.

Luna Manuel Padilla, conocido como Manuel Luna, es Trabajador Social y Gestor Cultural oriundo de San Marcos de Tarrazú, forma parte del equipo organizador del Festival Internacional de Poesía de Costa Rica, además imparte talleres de poesía y escritura creativa en varios centros penitenciarios.

Mabungu Eliza is an aspiring writer who is Film and television graduate from the University of Johannesburg. Fascinated by her own thoughts she enjoys writing short stories and would like to see her words transformed into motion pictures. She is currently working on a Novel which is disturbed by her quest to win a prize money for short stories to fund for her dream to run a Television Production company. She is a South African born Mozambican, who is talkative and channels her energy in writing.

Makokha Wanjohi wa has roots in Kenya and Tanzania. He is a literary critic and a poet. He upholds Pan Africanism and African Renaissance ideals. *Nest of Stones - Kenyan Narratives in Verse* (2010) is his full length debut book of poems.

Matimba Jackson Tendayi is a Zimbabwean writer who has been published in *Best New African Poets 2015 Anthology*, *Zimbofiction Poetry*. His first poetry collection entitled *The Nature of my Signature* was published by Royalty Publishing USA

Mooke Thabo was born in South Africa in 1950. His journalism experience spans more than three decades. He worked for The Mail in Mafikeng both as a reporter and bureau chief. He joined the now defunct Bop-TV and later promoted to Head of News. He moved to Mamelodi, his birthplace and started the first Black owned newspaper, Mamelodi News and in 2003, he launched another community newspaper, *Sosh Times*. In 1977, he published his poems, including, 'The thought of dying' in the literary magazine, *Staff Rider*, that was banned by the authorities. In 2014, he published his poems in the free international literature and arts magazine, *The Blotter* and contributes to online literary magazines. His debut e-Book, *Sins of Fathers and Mothers*, is in publication stages and he is writing his

second novel. Thabo Mooke is married, has two children, and lives in Lichtenburg.

Mussó Luis Carlos [Santiago de Guayaquil, Ecuador, 1970]. Estudió letras en grado y posgrado. Ha publicado una decena de poemarios, entre ellos *Propagación de la Noche* (2000), *Tiniebla de esplendor* (2006), *Minimal hysteria* (2008), *Evobé* (2008), *Geometría moral* (Arequipa, 2010) y *Cuadernos de Indiana* (2011, 2013). Además, *Oscurana* (novela, 2011). Muestras y antologías incluyen sus textos, como la que le dedica Alfaguara a las letras de su país (Madrid, 2009) y *Un país imaginario* (Quito, 2011; Madrid, 2013); así como revistas impresas y virtuales, entre ellas *Alhucema* (España), *Zundí* (Brasil), *Oxid* (Alemania), *Luvina* (México), *Sol Blanco* (Perú), *Bigsur* (Argentina). Seis veces premio nacional de literatura, es corresponsable de *Tempestad secreta* (muestra de poesía ecuatoriana contemporánea, 2010). Se desempeña en la cátedra universitaria y en el periodismo (crónicas). Ha sido traducido, parcialmente, al portugués, catalán, francés, inglés, hebreo y rumano.

NuBlaccSoUl: Phila Dyasi is my family and government name. I'm born and bred in KwaZulu-Natal. Writing became a major in my life at the end of 2013 after being runner-up in a national essay contest. My pseudonym is **NuBlaccSoUl** and publish under the name. All my writing is to document my life and acts as a platform to share my stories. They are, more often than not, similar to the experiences of other people so the narrative of each being is ever lost. I see myself through the world's eyes, a Social Commentator and a street journalist. I am an Afrikan!

Njoku Olisaemeka Gerald is a young, prolific, Nigerian poet. He is a published short fiction writer and has worked with a few publishing firms as an editor. His published works include: *Nestfruits* and *Folk Stories Retold for Children and Teenagers*. He is a graduate of linguistics from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. He is currently studying for his masters degree in sociolinguistics while teaching English at a college.

Nwaogu Ikechukwu is a writer and book reviewer with Mainland Book Café, Lagos. A graduate of Agricultural Economics from the University of Benin, he says writing brings him joy, and hopefully soon, money. In addition to short stories, he also dabbles in writing and directing stage drama, poetry, and is presently learning to write

screenplays. He credits his older siblings with giving him the love of reading and thereafter, writing, and hopes to finish writing a novel one of these days. His works have appeared on www.elseisy.com, www.shughar.com, and www.mainlandbookcafe.com. He blogs at www.inkspilla.wordpress.com and tweets at @eyekaywizard

Nyamu Kariuki wa is an aspiring literary scholar, author and poet who hails from Kenya. He is a Makerere University graduate with honours in English, Literature & Education. While in the countryside, he loves climbing indigenous trees, a place he gets pleasure from, as he reads aloud world's most outstanding verses. His poetry appears in *A Thousand Voices Rising* (2014), *Boda Boda Anthem and Other Poems* (2015), *Best "New" African Poets 2015 Anthology, Multi-verse: Kenyan Poetry Since 2003* (2016), among others. He is currently doing an MA (Literature) at Kenyatta University, Kenya. He is definitely one of the most loyal darlings of poetry in Africa.

Nzuza Ntando is a proud South African writer. He is currently doing his undergraduate degree at UKZN, Durban. He has had two of his short stories published on online magazines, *AFREADA literary magazine*, and *Type/Cast literary journal*. He is passionate about telling stories that explore human behavior and all the things that make us unique.

Ojo Afopefoluwa is a creative writer and an engineering student who currently resides and schools in Lagos, Nigera. She writes about complex themes and characters that interest her and she uses her writing as a means to understand the world and its various complexities. Some of her works can be found at artsandafrica.com.

Olaosebikan Eniola (who also goes by the pen name *soul writer*) is an author and a prolific writer. Some of her works have been published in national dailies, and subsequently, in prestigious journals. She actively reads her works at both local and international events/festivals. Writing being her primary passion, she possesses a first degree in Agricultural Economics and Extension, and a masters' degree in International Business Management. She shuffles between the United Kingdom and Nigeria.

Oroni Tendra was born in 1990 in Kenya. Currently he is the Editor of Edge Magazine and finalizing his masters degree in Communication and Journalism. He has written dozens of

unpublished poems, a novel-length manuscript and three unpublished children's storybooks yet to be published.

Osuchukwu Mystique-Syn O. is a creative artist whose works have appeared on local and international media. She hopes to complete her novel if she can stay off social media. She graduated from The University of Lagos where she read History and Strategic Studies. Writing however remains her passion in addition to cracking jokes, eating bread and writing erotica.

Oyeku Ayo is a Nigerian writer with over a decade contribution in the world of prose and poetry. His works have appeared in anthologies across the globe, including, *Illuminations* (Celestial Arts, 2006); *Fingernails across the Chalkboard* (Third World Press, 2007); *Miracle Literary Magazine* (Miracle e-zinr, Issue 2, 2012); *Stand Our Ground* (Freedomseed Press, 2013); *The Sky is Our Earth* (Sankofa, 2015). He appeared as a Guest Contributor in *According to Sources* (Writers Project of Ghana, 2015). VINYL, Kalahari Review, AFREADA & Brittle Paper are places to visit for his most recent works. He is finishing up on his second novel.

Parsons Natisha: I was born in Transkei on 8 February 1945. I am a retired teacher and I love to write. I have had some success with short story competitions. I write all sorts of stuff including non-fiction and many other genres. I presently live on the KZN South Coast, in Ramsgate. I enjoy good health and soundness of mind. I like to think so, anyway. I lived much of my life in Transkei (East Cape). Being a bi-racial person of colour, I have some grounding in things rural, as well as urban.

Ronkainen Khaya is a South African born writer based in Finland. She also writes a blog of poetry.

Sezzie Paul is an award winning poet. His poem, *Bitter Tales*, won the inaugural *Dede Kamukondo Poetry Contest* (November 2013) and the poem, *Children of the Sun*, came second in the *World Bank Group Art Competition on Ending Poverty in Malawi (Poetry Category)* (November 2015). He has published in local media and read poetry at various platforms including at Mwezi Wawala Arts and Land of Poets Festivals in Malawi.

Shoko Cosmas Tinashe was born on 27 September 1987, in the asbestos town of Zvishavane, in Zimbabwe. He studied a B.Sc. Honors degree specializing in Local Governance Studies at the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe. His vision is to advocate for social justice, social change and economic freedom. In October 2015 he met his own Damascus moment in which a friend highlights his poetic voice. Since then he is working on his first book and henceforth is in the branding episode in which he introduces himself.

Simbaya Enock I. is a young Electrical Engineer, graduated from the Copperbelt University in Zambia. In his precious free time, he reads, creates stories, brainstorming and daydreams of things that don't exist, punches excitedly at his keyboard when ideas abound, and plays with his guitar named Alma. His story *Morning Didn't Come* was published in the anthology *Welcome to the Future* compiled by Christina Escamilla. He is currently working on a number of stories and a fantasy novel.

Smith-Fick Cornelia (Connie Fick), the daughter of an Anglican priest, was born in Johannesburg. She recently completed a thesis for the MA Creative Writing at Rhodes University. A nurse by profession, she worked for a number of years as the editor of a primary health care magazine for nurses. She has been a freelance writer for *Takalani Sesame* (radio and TV) since its inception in 2000. Her poems and short stories have been published in various magazines.

Sosa Cameron, Martín — Poeta, escritor y dramaturgo argentino, nació en Córdoba, Argentina, 1951, ciudad en donde reside. Autor de numerosos artículos literarios y culturales, publicados en los principales diarios de su país, dirigió revistas artísticas y sus libros han merecido las mejores críticas, muchas de ellas de miembros de la Academia Argentina de Letras. Sus obras destacan por su audacia imaginativa y la innovación formal. Ha publicado, también, en Estados Unidos, España, Reino Unido y Rumania. Algunos títulos: *Interior del sueño*, *Los hombres de humo*, *Teatro*, *Imaginero de Córdoba*, *Viejo y enfermo iba yo en mi trineo*, *Los viajeros*.

Sosa Cameron, Martin — Argentinian poet, writer and playwright, was born in Cordoba, Argentina, 1951, the city where he lives. Author of numerous literary and cultural articles, published in major newspapers of his country, leading artistic magazines and in books

that have earned the best reviews, many of them from members of the Argentinian Letters Academy. His works are noted for their daring and imaginative formal innovation. He is published in the United States, Spain, United Kingdom and Romania. Some titles: *Interior del sueño*, *Los hombres de humo*, *Teatro*, *Imaginero de Córdoba*, *Viejo y enfermo iba yo en mi trineo*, *Los viajeros*.

Swanson Archie is a 60 year old Cape Town poet and surfer. His poems appear in the English Alive Anthology of 50 years of South African high school poetry, the 2014 and 2016 McGregor Poetry Festival anthologies and the *Best New African Poets 2015 Anthology* as well as the South African quarterly poetry publications, *New Contrast* and *Stanzas*. His work also can be found in poet Lara Kirsten's blog, the *Art of Jazz blog* and the Facebook page of Stop the Demolition of Marlborough School. Three of his poems, published in *Best New African Poets 2015 Anthology* were translated into Spanish by Martín López-Vega, and published in 2016 in the Spanish National newspaper, *El Mundo*.

Udenwe Obinna is the author of the award winning conspiracy crime thriller Satans and Shaitans published in 2014 in the UK by Jacaranda Books and in 2015 in Nigeria by AMAB Books. In January 2016 he received the Nigerian Writers Awards for his controversial short story series 'Holy Sex'.

Varela Ludwing. Tegucigalpa Honduras, 17 de Noviembre de 1984. Egresó del taller de Poesía "Edilberto Cardona Bulnes". Perteneció al grupo literario Máscara Suelta. Ha sido antologado en "*Honduras, sendero en resistencia*" Verbo editores, 2010 "*Deuda de Sangre*" Anamá, Nicaragua, 2015, "*Chamote*" Argentina, 2015. Entre su obra se encuentran "*Autobiografía de un hombre sin importancia*" Ñ editores 2012, "*Premonición del Extinguido*" Editorial del Gabo, El Salvador, 2014. Su obra ha sido recopilada en periódicos y revistas de México, Uruguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, España y Marruecos. Ha ganado los premios anuales de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras en las ramas de poesía, cuento, fabula y fotografía. Actualmente estudia literatura en la Universidad nacional de Honduras.

Wainwright Troydon was born in Zambia and is a philosopher and Reiki Master. He has won a Nova award for his short story, *The Sangoma's Storm*, and been a feature poet at the *Off the Wall* poetry

readings in Cape Town. He has also been published in the South African Literary journal, *New Contrast* and has a blog (www.troydonwainwright.com). At present, Troydon lives in Somerset West about an hour's drive from Cape Town.

Andrea Ward enjoys making sense of reality through fantasy. Writing stories is her path to sanity in a land which many find chaotic.

Warren Crystal is a South African poet. She lives in a book-lined flat in Grahamstown where she has worked in a library for the blind, an adult education NGO and a literary museum.

Watterson Delia: I am a single Mom; I breathe to write. I am very pleased to be part of Experimental writing- Volume one, it is a privilege to be included in this project. I have a few pieces published on *Botsotso*, a few in *Best New African Poets 2015 Anthology*.

Znaidi Ali (b.1977) lives in Redeyef, Tunisia. He is the author of several chapbooks, including *Experimental Ruminations* (Fowlpox Press, 2012), *Moon's Cloth Embroidered with Poems* (Origami Poems Project, 2012), *Bye, Donna Summer!* (Fowlpox Press, 2014), *Taste of the Edge* (Kind of a Hurricane Press, 2014), and *Mathemaku x5* (Spacecraft Press, 2015). For more, visit aliznaidi.blogspot.com.

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Experimental Writing

This project come out from our need to try and harness voices in Africa and the Latin America, giving these voices an opportunity to converse, argue, synthesize, agree, and share out ideas, it could be on the craft of writing, on life, on being, on thinking, so that we will all benefit. It was also an opportunity to create literary friendships or contacts between these two great regions. We also felt these regions generally still have a lot of stories to share other than any other regions in the world, and a lot of stories to offer to the world as they are still very strong storytelling traditions in these regions. And we were not disappointed in this aspect as we received amazing entries into the project and we feel we chose the best we could. We also felt, there is always that need for a writer or poet to try new horizons in their writing, to be explorers, thus why we decided to focus the anthology on experimentation. We felt it was the best way to represent these voices so that their stories will be appreciated in worlds other than theirs as experimentation does away with a lot of strictures that might weigh down on the presentation of the story. And here is the call we sent out:

EXPERIMENTAL WRITING: Volume 1 Africa Vs. Latin America

First rule is: there are no rules to creativity, writing, thinking, feeling, being. Beat the boundaries, bend, them, push them, pull, exaggerate, spread things around, throw the yoke off, blow smoke up, burn it, throw the ashes into the air...just do something new, unique, innovative about your writing. We are not looking for easy reads, writing that blindly follows the rules, writing hammered down, writing the literary establishment forces down our throats as correct, right, and universal. Send us your best experimental, avant-garde or innovative fictions, non-fictions, plays, poetry, mixed genres... in 2 languages: English and Spanish. Send work in only one genre of your choice!

Poetry (3 poems per poet, each poem must not be more than 40 lines)

Prose, plays and mixed genres (1 piece per writer, of not more than 5000 words)

Accepted entries will be translated into either Spanish or English, thus we will be publishing two books for this volume, one in Spanish and the other in English. These books will be published by two different publishers, the English volume by an African publisher (preferable), and the Spanish volume by a Spanish Latin American publisher (preferable)

Work must be sent in only one attached document, also include your contact details in this document, i.e., Postal address, Tel no, Email address and a bio note of not more than 100 words.

Please sent your entries to both, Tendai R. Mwanaka at mwanaka13@gmail.com and Ricardo Felix Rodriguez at felixricardo246@gmail.com

We received hundreds of entries of which we are indebted in each entrant, but we chose 62 writers and poets, of which 19 were purely fiction writers, 6 were mixed genres writers, 1 nonfiction writer, 1 playwright, 35 poets, and altogether we have 92 pieces in two languages English and Spanish. We were also able to translate a number of entries but not more than we would have wanted to do.

What we noticed with most of the stories and poetry we have from African in general is they were more interested in shaping the place they stayed; heritage, politics and war, in Africa, or a piece of Africa. South African stories are more focused on the issue of politics than any other African entries as they looked particularly at their political dispensation. We tried to accommodate as many voices and views on this issue in South Africa. NuBlaccSoUl tackles the flag, which is the nation, and what it represents for the new players in the dispensation, whilst Joproblog takes the middle ground as they dissuaded us to burn that flag down, asking the students at South African educational institutions to desist from burning down the campuses, which is a huge issue now in South Africa over apartheid systems or rules or artifacts still prevalent in these institutions. We also have Anton Krueger luminous rantings in dealing with this issue in his revolutionary diaries.

Stacy Hardy in the first entry in the anthology deals with a war situation in an unnamed African country. Afopefoluwa Ojo deals with the personal haunted worlds of the writers, artists or art

enthusiasts who dealt with the demons (supposed) in her own unique way. Ayo Oyeku deals with adultery, Ikechukwu Nwaogu deals with abuse and AIDS, whilst Samuel Kolawole deals with human rights abuse and the tense, invasive, dire and destructive situation that Uganda was in the times of Idi Amin. Yugo Gabriel Egboluche deals with personal human freedoms. Andrea Ward deals with deception and Enock Simbaya deals with how one gets healed through belief in some religious traditions. Ntando Nzuza deals with the difficulty of the Gay world in South Africa and the attendant persecutions before it was legalized, whilst Natisha Parsons deals with abuse in on the homefront. Troydon Wainwright and Obina Udenwe foraged far afield and dealt with American human rights abuses and the Syrian war respectively, Baraka Kagira, an 11 year old from Kenya, tackled the Mall bombings by al-shabaab in his nation whilst his countryman Wanjohi wa Makokha dealt with femininity and feminism. Some writers tackled issues to do with love, forgetting, memory, crime, the individual, friendships, civil rights, murder, hallucinations, alcohol abuse, the voice, literary discourse, and writing.

With regard to representatives of Latin America from the streets of Honduras Ludwig Varela describes a Latin America numbed by violence and crime where the family man lives on the border between the legal and the survival instinct, as an asphalt jungle where only the strongest survive. Soira Celestino from Brazil takes us back to the magical world of fairies and the dead in a romantic fable. In the conference of Hocquetot Gustavo Campos makes us witnesses of comic responses from a slightly eccentric writer, the poetry of Argentine Claudio Archubi invites us to dream with its dramatic and somber images at once. Carmen Berenguer Chilean poet invites us to dance with his musical lyrics that move like notes on a staff on the piano, in the same way Chary Gumeta and Leticia Luna from México captivate us with their lyrics and images. Héctor Flores poetically describes the Latin American identity under the approach of the conquest where the footprint of indigenous and Afro try to resist the force of the past in the present. From the beautiful Panamá Javier Alvarado with his dialogic, symbolic, Latin poetry precedes the poetry of Ecuadorian Luis Carlos Musso playing chess with his prose. Manuel Padilla Luna from Costa Rica, Honduran Murvin Andino Jimenez and Pedro Arturo Estrada of Colombia are other Latin

American writers who invite us to absorb their poetry. Martin Sosa from Argentina staged the meeting “Travelers” who are torn between the importance of food and art, survival, intellectuality, awaiting the train.

We would like to thank those who helped us promote this call who include among others, *Brittle Paper*, *Pen South Africa*, *Botsotso*, *Cathy’s Comps and Calls*, *CRWROPPS (Creative Writing Opportunities List)* and many others

We hope this robust selection will serve a wide variety of tastes in both Spanish and English, and the book will open dialogue and the sharing of ideas between the two regions and the whole world, and will be an invaluable addition to literary, writing and poetry collections and libraries all over the world.

Literatura Experimental

Este proyecto surge de la necesidad de tratar de aprovechar las voces de África y América Latina, dando eco a la oportunidad de conversar, discutir, sintetizar, estar de acuerdo, diferir y compartir ideas, puede ser dentro del terreno de la escritura, la vida, el ser, el pensamiento, de modo que todos nos beneficiemos. También fue una oportunidad para unirnos ya sea en amistades literarias o contactos entre representantes de estas latitudes. De la misma manera estamos convencidos de que estas regiones todavía tienen muchas historias por contar más que cualquier otra región en el mundo, ya que poseen arraigadas tradiciones de narrativa. Y no fuimos decepcionados en este aspecto ya que recibimos textos sorprendentes para incluir dentro del proyecto y consideramos que elegimos lo mejor que pudimos. Del mismo modo sentimos que siempre existe la necesidad de que un escritor o poeta explore nuevos horizontes en su obra, para lograrlo, fue que decidimos centrar la antología en el terreno de la experimentación. Nos pareció que era la mejor manera de representar a estas voces, para que sus historias fueran apreciadas en mundos distintos de los suyos ya que la experimentación elimina una gran cantidad de restricciones que podrían limitar la presentación de la historia. Aquí reproducimos el llamado que hicimos:

Literatura Experimental: Volumen 1 África Vs. América Latina

La primera regla es: no existen reglas en la creatividad, la escritura, el pensamiento, el sentimiento el ser. Derribar fronteras, doblarlas, empujarlas, jalarlas, exprimirlas, romper el yugo, exhalar el humo hacia el cielo, arrojar las cenizas al aire... simplemente proponer algo nuevo, único, innovador en el terreno de la escritura. No estamos buscando una lectura fácil, literatura que sigue las reglas ciegamente, más bien escribir amartillando, escribir con la fuerza más pura de la creación. Envíanos tú escrito vanguardista o ficción innovadora, realista, teatral, poética, híbrido... puede ser en español o inglés. ¡Enviar el trabajo solo en el género e idioma de tu elección!

Poesía (tres poemas por cada escritor, cada poema no debe contener más de 40 líneas).

Prosa, obras de teatro y géneros mixtos (1 pieza por cada escritor, de no más de 5000 palabras).

Las propuestas aceptadas serán traducidas al español o al inglés dependiendo del caso. Se pretende publicar dos volúmenes: uno en español y otro en inglés. Estos serán publicados por dos editoriales diferentes, el volumen en inglés por una editorial Africana y el ejemplar en español por una latinoamericana.

Los trabajos deberán ser enviados en un documento de Word adjunto donde se incluyan los datos del autor: dirección, número de teléfono, correo electrónico y una biografía de no más de 100 palabras.

Por favor envía tú propuesta a ambos editores: Tendai R. Mwanaka en mwanaka13@gmail.com y Ricardo Félix Rodríguez felixricardo246@gmail.com

Recibimos cientos de entradas por las que estamos en deuda con cada participante, pero elegimos 62 escritores, de los cuales 19 eran puramente escritores de ficción, 6 escritores de géneros mixtos, 1 escritor de no ficción, 1 dramaturgo, 35 poetas, en total reunimos 92 piezas en dos idiomas: inglés y español. Fuimos capaces de traducir un número determinado de textos, pero no todos los que hubiéramos deseado.

Lo que notamos con la mayoría de las historias y poemas que recibimos de África, en general, es que están más interesados en describir la experiencia del mundo en que residen; la herencia, la política y la guerra, en África, o un pedazo de África. Las historias sudafricanas están más enfocadas en el tema de la política más que ninguna otra región, haciendo énfasis particularmente en su administración política. Intentamos dar cabida a la mayor cantidad de voces y puntos de vista sobre este tema en África del Sur. NuBlaccSoUl ataca a la bandera, que es la nación, y lo que representa para los nuevos jugadores en la región, mientras Joproblog adopta una posición intermedia, ya que nos disuadieron de quemar dicha bandera, pidiendo a los estudiantes de los centros educativos en Sudáfrica que desistan de la quema de banderas en los planteles, lo cual es un gran problema ahora en dicha región a razón de una organización o reglas o costumbres tipo apartheid que aún prevalecen en estas instituciones. También tenemos a Antón Krueger con sus lúcidos desvaríos en el análisis de esta cuestión dentro de sus diarios revolucionarios.

Stacy Hardy en el primer texto de la antología nos describe una situación de guerra en un país africano sin nombre. Afopefoluwa Ojo

se ocupa del mundo embrujado de los escritores, artistas o aficionados al arte que se enfrentan a los demonios (supuestamente) en su particular estilo. Ayo Oyeku habla sobre adulterio, Ikechukwu Nwaogu se ocupa de los abusos y el SIDA, mientras que Samuel Kolawole se ocupa de violaciones de los derechos humanos y la tensa, invasiva, grave y destructiva situación que Uganda vive en los tiempos de IdiAmin. Yugo Gabriel Egboluche se ocupa de las libertades humanas. Andrea Ward, aborda el tema del engaño y EnockSimbaya se ocupa de cómo uno se cura mediante la fe en algunas tradiciones religiosas. Ntando Nzuza hace referencia a la complejidad del mundo gay en África del Sur y las persecuciones concomitantes antes de que fuera legalizado, mientras Natisha Parsons se ocupa de los abusos en el homefront. Troydon Wainwright y Obina Udenwe se enfocan en abusos a los derechos humanos de los americanos y la guerra en Siria respectivamente, Baraka Kagira, uno niño de 11 años de Kenia, aborda los bombardeos del centro comercial de Al-Shabaab en su país, mientras que su compatriota Wanjohi wa Makokha se enfoca en el tema de la feminidad y el feminismo. Algunos autores abordan cuestiones relacionadas con el amor, el olvido, la memoria, el crimen, el individuo, las amistades, los derechos civiles, el asesinato, las alucinaciones, el abuso del alcohol, la voz, el discurso literario y la escritura.

En lo que concierne a los representantes de Latinoamérica desde las calles de Honduras Ludwing Varela nos describe una Latinoamérica adormecida por la violencia y la delincuencia donde el hombre de familia vive entre la frontera de lo legal y el instinto de supervivencia, como una jungla asfáltica donde solo los más fuertes sobreviven. Soira Celestino desde Brasil nos remonta al mágico mundo de las hadas y los muertos en una fábula romántica. En la conferencia de Hocquetot Gustavo Campos nos hace testigos de las cómicas respuestas de un escritor un poco excéntrico, la poesía del Argentino Claudio Archubi nos invita a ensoñar con sus imágenes dramáticas y sombrías a la vez. Carmen Berenguer la poetisa chilena nos invita a bailar con sus letras musicales que se agitan como notas en un pentagrama sobre el piano, de la misma manera CharyGumeta y Leticia Luna desde México nos cautivan con sus letras e imágenes. Héctor Flores describe poéticamente la identidad latinoamericana

bajo el enfoque de la conquista donde la huella del indígena y el afro tratan de resistir la fuerza del pasado en el presente. Desde la bella Panamá Javier Alvarado con su poesía dialógica, simbólica, latina antecede a la poética del ecuatoriano Luis Carlos Mussó que juega al ajedrez con su prosa. Manuel Padilla Luna de Costa Rica, Murvin Andino Jiménez de Honduras y Pedro Arturo Estrada de Colombia son otros de los escritores latinoamericanos que nos invitan a absorber su poesía. Desde Argentina Martín Sosa escenifica el encuentro de los viajeros que se debaten entre la importancia de la comida y el arte, supervivencia, intelectualidad, la espera, el tren.

Nos gustaría agradecer a los que han contribuido a promover este llamado, que incluyen a BrittlePaper, Pen South Africa, Botsotso, Cathy's Comps and Calls, CRWROPPS (Lista de oportunidades de escritura creativa) y muchos otros.

Esperamos que esta amplia selección encarne una gran variedad de gustos en español e inglés, y el libro contribuya a abrir el diálogo e intercambio de ideas entre las dos regiones y el mundo entero, del mismo modo que represente una valiosa adición a la literatura y la poesía en colecciones privadas y bibliotecas de todo el mundo.

FICTION/FICCION

River Blindness

By Stacy Hardy

They walk in a line. They follow each other, one after, the next and the next. The line is unbroken. The one behind's hand holds onto the shoulder of the one in front. They form a chain. Each one is a link. The one and then the next, linked together to make a line, a thing. They move slowly. Going is not easy. They stumble and start. It takes time to find the rhythm, the pace of the one in front and the one after that. They take a few steps. They shudder. Even the slightest pause, a brief halt can cause an upset, a jolt in the motion, a broken beat. It ripples back down the line and they have to start again. One and then one, one step and the next, building the rhythm. The rhythm grows, it swells. By midday they are almost in tune. They are moving quickly now. Like some extinct animal, lumbering, unstoppable, crashing through the bush.

The one in front leads. He holds out his right hand to protect his face, instinctively shields his eyes even though they are useless. In his left hand he carries a stick. The stick is rough and gnarled, a branch picked up from the wayside. He taps ahead of him. From time to time he waves it, he feels and probes. Other times he uses it as a scythe or a hacksaw. He hacks ahead, clears the path.

The going is not easy. Towards evening the brush is thick, the trees have roots and knots, ropy nooses that snap shut and ensnare toes. The branches weave together to form trip flares and trap pits. The vines are hangmen. The heaped leaves are pyres. The bush is the enemy. It is waiting ahead of them, hanging low. The bush is everywhere. It surrounds them, to the left and to the right. In places the trees grow tall and it hangs above. The bush is alive. They can hear it, the rustles and snaps, something moving. The sound travels and gets lost, it bounces off tree trunks, twists then snaps shut. Bamboo whips sting their faces. They brush them aside. They walk through bleeding cheeks and twisted ankles. They have no choice. There is nowhere to stop, no clearing big enough.

They move slowly. A kilometre can take days, weeks. It makes no difference; they have lost all sense of time. They have long abandoned names, discarded like the other things they have lost on

the way, the excess baggage and extra clothes, the rotten food they had to throw out after a week, the stragglers, those who for some reason couldn't keep up or were forced to turn back. Their numbers dwindle. In the beginning there are eleven. Eleven, just imagine it, uneven, an impossible number, a whole soccer team. Just getting into a line, lining up, one through to eleven, takes forever.

Movement is slow. So many stops and starts. The girl who keeps tripping and falling, can't find her feet. She is Eight to begin with but as they progress she moves backwards. Number Nine then number Ten. It makes no difference, where ever they place her, she slips and skidders, she stumbles. She can't explain it. She tilts her head and the whole world tilts, to the left or to the right. She says it's like her balance went with her sight.

Number Seven snorts, an absurd idea of course, everyone knows it, balance is controlled by the ears and not the eyes. She hangs her head, has no answer. She tries again. Eight down to Ten, finally all the way back to number Eleven, then one day, gone. No one can explain it. Number Ten is stumped. His hands grope at empty air, she was right there. There! It was so hard to tell, her touch was so light, her hand on his shoulder, always falling off, releasing her grip, stopping and starting. Somehow he lost track.

In the morning they gather at the riverbank and call out loudly. They shout and wait for the echo. It comes back to them over the water, soft and hollow, somehow sad. Someone says, maybe she simply fell behind; maybe all she needs is time. They wait until the sun is on their faces. They wait until it is dead above, high in the sky. They wait until evening, until they can't wait any longer. They are losing valuable time. They set out again, more cautiously. Each one clasps the one in front, hands knot into tight fists, fingers lock into button holes and belt loops, hang on for all they're worth. At dawn they do a headcount. Ten. They make a line. They touch each other's faces, like ants meeting on a path, their fingers are feelers, stroking cheeks, creeping into ears. The sun is rising slowly. The hot rays wash their skin. They cuddle up. They sleep close together, despite the heat, limbs flung over each other, legs intertwined and knotted. They sleep restlessly, the sound of their breathing, fitful and erratic. They do not cry anymore, tears are the luxury of the sighted, a performance of emotions, a way of communicating pain or grief that has no

meaning in their world. Instead they moan. They conjure all manner of grunts and sighs from the pits of their bellies. They make noises they never thought themselves capable of. Dry sobs that hiccough out their mouths, hot breaths sputtering into grunts and phlegmy snarls, a low exhalation, a powerful sigh. They sigh because of the hardship, because of the cold currents that come off the river and make ice on the tongue, because of the burning heat at midday.

They sigh when they wake up. Everything hurts, the whole body. Their legs are stiff and hollow, stomachs growl. Breakfast is so little, a few scraps, the daily ration. Everyone is suspicious. One got more than Five. Four is hording, the balls of sticky rice, it is always the same sticky rice, and the same big flies that swarm on their faces, the same fistful of dried peas and nuts that stick in their teeth. Still they fight. They bicker and spit. There is never enough. They sit licking their fingers, drive large flies away from their eyes with their free hands.

It takes so long to get started. To find their things, their bags and backpacks, a missing shoe, missing or kicked away in the night. Groping on hands and knees, bones clicking and sighing as they stand, wobbling, as they orientate. They make a line, they shuffle into their places. One through to Ten. Even then the going is slow. Someone is always sick, heaving and coughing. The old man who falls suddenly ill. He doesn't fall so much as sit down one day and refuse to go any further. He sits with his hands on his knees and his head bowed. He waves them away, go without me, I'm only holding you back. His voice is so tired and heavy no one dares argue. They do as he says. They go. They go silently. They link their arms. One to Three. They form a line. They lurch and they build their rhythms. For a while the going is easy, the jungle has given way to a sandy stretch. The sand is hard. Their footsteps drum on its surface.

One through to Nine, and then the Eight, the man that suddenly changes his mind. Out of the blue he calls a halt. He says, but this is madness! Look at us. They stand with their heads down. They do not look because they cannot look. Most of them have given up on the whole idea of appearance. They have let their beards grow long and hair knot. They stand like that frozen, wrapped in rags, hunched, swaying slightly as though drunk, feet in the dirt, suddenly aware of their unsightliness. The shame! It grows and grows until one speaks

out against it, pushes it down. Number Six: go, if you have a better plan!

And he does. The Eighth one stands. He makes a performance, an audio event, seeking out his things, sighing and scrambling then suddenly silent. They can hear him standing, his breath. They can hear him waiting. Maybe some of them think, yes, he is right, madness! But no one follows. They stay still. They wait until they hear him go, until the crunch of his feet turns into a whisper, until it blends with the thousands of whispers that fill the night: the trees and the animals, birds and insects, the hushed voices they swear they hear, sometimes so clearly they freeze on the spot. They bring the whole line to a halt. One crashes into the other and another is pulled back, jerked mid step by a frozen hand on the shoulder. Listen, they mouth. They tap the one in front. The tap runs down the line like a snake or a wave. It pitter-patters. It ticks then halts, arrives in the front. It arrives at the leader, the number One who must interpret it and make a call.

He listens carefully. It is crucial not to make a mistake. It is possible the sound is the enemy, the enemy setting a trap, the enemy planning an attack. They have not seen the enemy but they know it is out there. They know because sometimes they hear it. They hear the bombs, muted blasts that make the ground shake, different type of bombardment: the successive tremors, air pressure. The sound of explosion after explosion, it can't be... it definitely can't just be the wind.

They know because the enemy is why they are here. Why they are on the move. Moving forward they call it, but really it is fleeing. The enemy has forced them to flee. There are those who still hear things, explosions in their head, bullets popping and the smell: carbide, gun-smoke, burning thatch. There are those who say the enemy has made them blind. There are stories, rumours. Something found floating in the river in the morning, a dark swollen thing, the face blanched, eyes wide, the mouth open and thick with water. A body exhumed by fishermen and carried back to shore. And then another and another, twisting slowly, face up, face down, face up.

River blindness they call it. You'll recognise the eyes, the vacant stare, ghostly pale, fixed forward or sometimes squint, staring off in opposite directions. The opaque film that has descended. The film is

developed, it has black patches and moments of light, white glowing spots where lesions have been burned into the retina. Always, it happens so slowly. Not like being struck or afflicted. It is not like an act of God. Rather something more insidious, a halo that starts on the outer edges of the vision, a floating thing, an amoeba that suddenly appears as if a cell has cut loose from the programme, swollen to a hundredth of its size, an invisible thing rendered suddenly visible. It is like staring into a Petri dish. The amoeba splits and splits again. The amoeba doubles its numbers. Now there are two, then four, perfect divisible, and again. The dark patch grows. Not black exactly, not blackness, too variously shaded to be called darkness, too permeable to be a blindfold. It is something else, something that encompasses all those things but commits to none, something impossible, unstoppable.

They can't escape it. Everywhere they look the river is as wide as a lake, a sea, or a plain. It consumes their lives. It flows. Now they follow it. They have no choice. A river is like a road. It always leads somewhere, the next village and the next. They walk through hundreds of them, deserted like ghost towns. Or maybe there are other people, they just can't see. Maybe they are blind like them, hiding in their house or wandering amongst the ruins, their heads lolling back, gaping up at the heaven as if waiting for an answer from God.

They call out, no answer. Village after village, it is the same. At times, they think they are walking in circles, that there'll be nothing after. But there is something, a town, they can hear a dog barking, they can smell the smoke in the air. The streets have no paving. They keep close to the tiny houses and shacks, thread forward slowly. Now and again they stop, hoping to find - what? Food. Something left in a doorway or on a shelf. A bag of rice or millet. A sweet potato, even shrivelled up. Something more, the real prize, a tin that has rolled loose, buttery beans in thick tomato sauce, whole sardines preserved in oil! A sign of life.

It is useless. They are too late. Everything burned or looted, houses devoured from the inside like empty shells. The aluminium sheets bang in the wind, the plastic whipping loose from the roofs against the sides, the lingering smell of smoke. The breeze carries it, some of it blows into their faces.

They travel at night because it is safer. At night everything is dark. The playing field is level. The landscape is rocky and dangerous. Everyone stumbles and falls, blinded under the blanket of darkness. They set out in the early evening. Feel the darkness coming down by the sudden change in the air, the dip as the sun is sucked away and night comes. They gather their things, a million tiny sighs and sucks as bags are loaded on to backs and shoulders sag. They order themselves into a line. They assume the position, each in his or her correct placement, behind the one in front and after the one behind. They feel with their hands, seek out the familiar faces. They link arms to form the snake, each arm rested on the one in front's shoulders. They begin to move. The familiar lurch as it sets out. The snake slides, it hesitates then flicks forward. It gathers speed. The One, Two, Three, Four, all the way to Eight.

More have been lost. The couple that vanish one evening, who suddenly aren't there. They wouldn't notice but for their things: emptied and scattered, bags riffled through. Things are missing. So many things! Food and clothing and personal possessions, things that have meaning only to those who owned them. Who would want an old book? A letter from a loved one that no one could read? A pair of sunglasses? Stupid! A left over vanity, an empty conceit to shield blind eyes from the blind? Other things.

The couple. Where are they? They call out. They keep their faith. They hope for the best. It's a joke or a prank. Or the worst: an enemy invasion, a brigade that stalked them in the night. Maybe the couple were startled and awoken. Maybe they are lying dead or wounded, at their feet, just out of reach, a hundred metres. Right there! Unable to call out. They search the site, look for clues. Down on their hands and knees. The ground is muddy, slick with dirt and shit. They run their hands. They make a list. Things found: debris, rubble, plastic bags and bottles. Things presumed missing or lost. So many. So many people. The sounds at night in the village: the footsteps, like people wandering in circles and then the sobbing, soft but penetrating weeping that rings through the night.

They shake their heads. There is nothing to be done. They set out again. They lash their things more tightly to their backs. They begin to march. Look at them go. Look at them stumble and slip. They are moving very slowly now. They travel with heavy hearts. The thought

of the danger, the enemy, or the worse, a thought more dangerous, the enemy inside, within their ranks, within themselves. They have become silent, suspicious. Four blames Three. Five blames Four, she has developed the feeling he is glaring at the back of her head. The spot has become numb and swollen, it itches. She keeps running her hand through her hair. More than anything she wants to turn around and confront him. But say what? Her accusation is ridiculous. She lowers her head and keeps waking, scuffs her feet in the dirt. Others hang back. A desperation that has started to set in, a hard knot in their throats that they have to swallow to push down.

Everyday, waking as if from the dead. It is always the same, waking, blinking, not believing, trying to cast it aside, push it up or down. One is the first awake. He opens his eyelids and sucks in his breath. Everywhere the limitless pale nothingness, an endless mist, as if by some false step he has fallen into a fathomless veil. The veil is a presence, a thing. It is not a not seeing, a sightlessness, it offers no such relief. By its very nature it demands viewer participation, imposes so one has to look and look. You can't just cast it aside, you can't break through, no matter how many times, he reaches up his hand and wipes it across his eyes as if to unhook it, to pull the blind.

The gesture sticks, it becomes a small tick, a nervous action he performs every few minutes, pausing briefly to run his hand. It is impossible, the blindness holds tight. The blindness has little claws that pins the eyes. It is sly, plays tricks on him so that sometimes he thinks he sees things - thinks or imagines. Sometimes he looks for them. He concentrates until the darkness becomes something more, a vague form, a patch of lighter dark, a ghost-of-a-form manifesting after enough concentration. Sometimes he thinks he is surrounded, hundreds of them. All around him shapes moving, incomprehensible creatures that emerge and vanish at the end of his vision, so real he tries to touch them. He lifts then lowers his hands. He swallows hard, forces himself to breathe, growing calmer, sinking into darkness, slowly, the world vanishing into nothing again. He walks with his eyes enveloped in mist, focused on the sensation of moving forward, his legs, his arms, the hand that never leaves his shoulder.

They reach the bridge at the end of the night. It has been heavy going. The brush is thick on all sides. It resists parting. They have to fight their way, to hack and tear. The hacking and tearing leaves them

exhausted. Surely it has to stop, to come to an end somehow. Then it does. They are at the threshold. They would have walked over, toppled, if it wasn't the stick, suddenly floating, suspended, like the ground has fallen out. Below they can hear the water, the river cutting its course, a deep ravine. Number Three is the first to say it, we're fucked, it's impossible.

The bridge is wood and metal, one of the UN's infrastructure projects that has been left uncompleted. Formidable ironwork and a barrier of crossbeams but the wooden planks have rotted, in places fallen away. There is no railing. The going is slow. They have to see the bridge with their hands and feet. They have to first build it before they can cross, the metal frame for support and then the slats. One tests each slat, steps, two behind him then Three. A rasping, someone struggling for breath, the soft bone-on-bone groan of hinges, parts too often employed in the same gestures. There is nothing to do but press forward. It is like that joke, how does a blind man drive a car? Four thinks this. He remembers it suddenly. He doesn't know why. Why now, at this exact moment? He remembers the answer: One hand on the wheel; the other on the road. He starts to laugh. The joke is not funny, he knows that. The joke is nowhere near to funny but somehow he can't stop himself, the laugh won't go down, it bubbles then breaks the surface.

The sound startles number Five. She begins to wobble. The world around her spin and for a minute she loses her footing then, miraculously, regains it, miraculously because it's only in this instant of imminent death that she feels alive, suddenly understands it, the difference between blindness and deadness, darkness and eternal darkness. It comes to her in a flash: she doesn't want to die. She musters all her effort. She races through her body and finds her feet, holds out her right arm for balance. The sweat from her forehead streams into her eyes. She does nothing to stop it. She stands very still, everything suspended, afraid to breath even.

Then it comes, from behind, from the very back someone calls out. It goes down the line, travels and reaches her. She hears her number and suddenly it is happening again. She loses her footing, this time falling. No one knows, understands what is happening. They can't see but they can feel it. For a moment everything's fuzzed over and blurry, their collective body contracting as if zapped by an

electric probe. An extended endless silence, then they hear the sound. Impossible! It is so faint, so distant, so undramatic after the build up. It sounds like a stone skimming the surface. A stone dropped to judge distance. But it is her, she has fallen.

Moving again, starting up, slowly, putting back the pieces. Seven is now Six. Six is Five. Five is Four. Stretching out their arms, looking for each other, hands struggling against the murky darkness covering their faces, feeling, one hand finds another, recognises the touches, embraces, linking arms to form a single body. Going, not thinking. It is better not to think, not to try and imagine what lies ahead. It is best simply to go, moving, responding reflexively to the acoustic sensors, the way sound bounces around objects and fills them out, how sound creates dimension and volume. Everything is visible and yet invisible, the curve of the horizon is rounded. The shape of the path as it forms in front of them. The path runs straight and then dips, winding slowly downward. They follow. They follow the sound of the river. At times it is nothing more than a gurgle then it picks up, they are moving very quickly now, they are gushing.

They are in a valley, or so One imagines it. Behind his dead eyes he sees the sides of the mountains rolling up. Sometimes he thinks it is like being inside his own head, his eye balls have flipped backward and he is seeing the white of the skull walls, the endless folds of grey matter. His whole life folded up inside him, suspended, something waiting to be resumed, as if the blindness is temporary, the whole thing is just a dream. He is at home in his bed. He can feel the change in the air. Dawn coming, a dawn that brings no light, an empty dawn, endless drab grey light that seemed more like the onset of night than the beginning of day. The heavy silence that descends as the sun rises. The silence is like a darkness, it covers everything.

They would have tripped right over the hump if it weren't for the smell, rising up ahead of them, enough to make One gag. He freezes and backs up, causing the line to convulse, to dip then break at the centre. He stands very still then takes a step. Maybe it's nothing, a dead dog or an animal carcass, they have passed others, always the smell first and then sounds of the birds, but none this fresh, rancid. He works against his stomach, lurching, pulling him back. He steps then kicks at the object. He feels the weight, a leaden deadness, the

dead thing rolling then falling back. He can tell without needing to get any closer.

What is it? A voice comes down the line. Nothing, a dog. They should step over it and keep going, he knows that but something pulls him back. The dead thing has hands that grab, arms drawing him down. The dead thing demands his attention and he finds himself bending, stretches out his fingers. The face is cold and rigid but alive, crawling with flies that swarm up his hand, flicker against his face. He waves them away. He clears a path. The skin underneath is broken, peeling away but the structure is unmistakable. It is Four. The first Four. The man who left. The same hollow eyes, heavy cheekbones but now he is grinning, a wide grin, a grin that grows from ear to ear, gums peeled back in a big, broad, stupid, crescent smile.

It hangs above him for days afterward. It sits above his shoulders in the sky. He can't shake it. He keeps returning and returning. He replays the day the Four left. He remembers he was pleased at the time, he remembers thinking, let him go. He thinks of the others. Thirteen, her little hands always groping, how her voice wobbled with confusion. Ten, Five, Four, not stopping, not even bothering to bury the corpses. Suddenly he doesn't want to be One anymore. He wants to swap places. He wants to be Three or Four. Better yet he wants to move right to the back. He wants to simply drop off and disappear into the night.

A reshuffle. His idea is met with silence. They are already in a line. They know their places. It has taken so much time to build this basic formation, to get it to work, all the arms linking and legs lifting at the right pace. The machine is in place. The colony is moving, a line of black ants that cuts the landscape. Why change it now? Why fuck it up? Two is unmoved. Who would lead? I don't know my left from right. Everything stalls. Finally he gives in. He has no choice. Two's hand guides him, firm on his shoulder, familiar. See, how easy is it is? Her mouth is close to his ear. Her quiet voice cuts through the middle of his body, settles on top of his stomach.

He walks in a daze. The landscape flattens and expands. It makes concessions to accommodate his emptiness. The landscape has become a desert. In the stony white light their eyes are almost transparent, smashed irises under papery lids. The heat becomes

more and more suffocating as they move. By midday it is too much, even number One can go no further. He calls a halt. The line spasms as the command runs down its ranks. The line breaks, a sudden scattering like a smashed object, a cup or a saucer, its contents evaporating. They sink down into the ground. Sit with their bony arses in the dirt. They do not speak. They wipe their hot shiny faces with the backs of their hands, shield their dead eyes against the sun even though its useless, too late, the damage is already done.

They have become lazy, careless. They travel during the day and sleep at night. They become children. They believe their blindness is a shield, a veil that covers and protects. They believe that because they cannot see they cannot be seen. They imagine themselves untouchable somehow. They push forward. They walk like dead men, let the vines whip their faces and branches tear at their clothes. They walk blindly. Blind faith. They have forgotten the enemy when it finally comes, a suffocating disturbance in the darkness, a thrum like beating wings. At first it feels like it is deep inside them, the vibration low and steady like the base-thump of a car passing, blasting music into the night. Slowing it rises, fills the earth with a deafening whir. It is number Three who gets it first: A helicopter! He is waving his hands when he says it. For a moment the others freeze. They don't seem to understand then they run, scattering left and right. It is only Three that stays behind. He is transfixed, swept up by the pull of the blades, the whirlpool that spirals into the sky. He remembers the UN helicopters, their elongated white bodies. He thinks, this is my chance, my last chance. It's now or never. He stretches up his hands to greet them. Everything has gone quiet, the bird and the blades, the beating of his heart in his chest and head, the spray of the bullets. His knees cave in but to him it feels like he is rising, the blades of the helicopter whiplash his skull.

Now there are three. Just like that, they stumble out of the jungle, wandering, limping. They find each other. They shake their heads, dazed; they stop, anaesthetized by the silence, then slowly, cautiously they begin again, a single ant instead of an army. You need eyes to see it. The first segment is the head. It leads, black and shiny, a thin feeler that probes and pokes, collects data, blind armour-like eyes that never blink. The second segment power its legs, ricketted spindles

that lock and claw. The final black segment is the largest. It is blind and dumb, a dead weight that drags behind, weighs them down.

One and Two make the decision without words. They somehow know, the smells is unmistakable. It comes from him, the reek of perspiration, old grime and something else, what? They are thinking the same thing, One and Two. They have started to keep a distance. They know it's only a matter of time. Every day he falls behind further. They have to stop and wait. Everyday, the distances grows, deepens, between them. One and then Two close on his heels, sticking to him like a shadow. Further back Three is calling out. They ignore him. That night they sleep close together. They rise early. Three is still asleep. They can hear him breathing, struggling for breath. They begin to move, taking each step carefully. They put their feet down in just the right places, not breathing more than is necessary.

The two are alone, One and Two, the man and the woman. The night stretches on endlessly, so does the mountain. They climb and climb, test the ground with the tips of their feet until they find solid footholds. They walk close, swaying, slipping, fighting to keep their balance. They do not part, never, even when they are snagged in the bristles of plants, even when they stumble on the loose rocks.

Give me your hand, she says. She holds it, she guides his fingers. She runs them along the nape of her neck, her face. She lets him touch each eye. She closes them and feels his hand on her eyelids, a sudden shock sensation like seeing again, feeling her eyes come alive. Her faces gains volume, shape, features. Her lips. Each lip, and parting them, pulling the fingers in with her tongue, heeling them in her mouth. How he searches, gaps and crannies, spaces she never even knew existed.

She pulls herself up and then slumps back down. She is too tired. The wound has split open again and there is a swelling. It is hot to the touch. It burns when she cups her hand. She lowers her head. She doesn't want to go anymore. She sits in the dirt. She can feel him above her, his shadow over her. She tries to push him away but it is useless. He is too strong. Their bodies locked, struggling into an awkward embrace. He lifts her so easily, a sack of potatoes! He swings her so she hangs off him. Her hands clutch his shoulders, straddling his back she pushes her ear against him and listens to his heartbeat.

The tears surprise him. He didn't know his eyes remembered how to cry. He feels the salt rise in his throat. He swallows hard but it won't go down. His tongue lies heavy in his head, heavier than her. He carries her on his shoulder. At first it is easy. She seems so light, effortless in comparison to his own weight, the rock in his heart. He swings her up and over. He walks, pauses only occasionally to switch the load, from one shoulder to another, left to the right. Finally he carries her slumped in his arms. Her right arm hangs loose, away from her body so it drags in the dirt, traces a trail. He walks and then stops. He feels her slipping, a sudden release, a disequilibrium so he stumbles. He comes down on his knees next to her body. He rolls over and lies staring blindly upward. He breathes. He thinks he will rest, just for a while. There is no hurry.

The Tattoo: Love Redefined

By Ikechukwu Nwaogu

Hello, dear reader, there's something we want you to see. We know you're busy, reading and all, but please take some time off, and come with us. We're going to a place, high above the earth, where we can watch the planets spinning lopsidedly on their slanted axes. There's a distinct advantage to being able to see this view, it helps you focus on the more significant things. Please don't think this is all there is to it. We are thoughts, you see, and such mundane things as matter and space are really of no consequence to such as us. Let's go, shall we?

This is a particularly breathtaking scene, is it not? We're headed down to Africa, the nation of Nigeria, the city of Lagos. And there, right in the metropolis, we're asking you to look around the University of Lagos. Ah, here we are, peeping through the third floor window in one of the many hostels that surround the campus. We see a girl, towel tied around her chest, washing her face at the mirror. She has been crying, but not anymore. She's showing some steel, some resolve. There's that stiffening of the upper lip, and that slight tinge of redness in her cheeks. We flit to the bed to check it out, just as she packs up the papers on the bed and stuffs them into a folder.

As she straightens out the bed, we perch silently on her shoulder, and survey the room. It is not spartan, and yet not plush. There are books, on the two shelves, some are too neat-they must be new, don't you think, and some are dog-eared, obvious favourites. The girl picks up the brown, leather bound Bible from the bed, and drops it on the table. We're sure you're curious as to the cause of the girl's actions, but we can no more turn back time than can rain fall upward. But this girl, she looks interesting, don't you agree? She stops in front of her wardrobe, one of those collapsible cloth-and-iron contraptions that peddlers hawk in traffic jams. You are familiar with traffic jams, no? Stay in any metropolis, and the familiarity will come. She has thrown aside the towel now, and while we concede that she has a nice body, and is attractive, pretty even, there's a certain hardness in the eyes, a wary guardedness in the face, that tells us that this girl will never be completely open, never let her guard down, never be called

beautiful, at least not in its true sense. Beauty has a little innocence in it, or are we wrong?

We're two, you know, I'm Okrofo, and the other one at your other shoulder is Okorowanta. Together, we're your guides on this mission, and if you stick with us, we'll go places. We're in Africa, so that's why our names sound like that. In other places, they may call us Hornswiggle and Hornswoggle, or whatever they will, but the names will do for now. More later.

This girl, she's dressing up now, donning a bra and panties, maybe all that bare skin is giving you ideas, but may I remind you that this is not a place where we have any physical form, and as such you cannot, or at least ought not, to be moved by such petty things as the display of bare skin. Those earrings are a bit too subdued for the black outfit she has on, don't you think? Whatever, we are here to observe, not to make comments about fashion and style. She grabs her keys, and her mobile phone, a Blackberry, I think, and heads out the door. We flit noiselessly through the walls and emerge on the outside. Calm down, we're descending. It's a lot better to have your ears (and eyes too) close to the ground. Aha, here she is, flagging down a bike. Wonder where she's going? Stick around.

Okrofo, you've made us miss out on the conversation with the bike man, I dare say, if we had physical bodies I would leave you alone and go off alone every now and then! You run your mouth too much. Reader dear, let's hang on to the strands of her hair extensions blowing in the breeze. Can you hear me? Good, unlike Okrofo, I don't believe in talking too much, let's just hang here and enjoy the breeze blowing through her fake hair, no?

Oho, listen up, the bike is slowing down, lean this way, the view is better. She gives the man a hundred naira note- that's Nigerian currency, you know, and collects two green bills in return. That's two twenties. So her fare was sixty naira.

**giggles* just flexing my mathematical muscles.*

Whoa, whoa, who would have thought? Barbershop? Now I'm very curious, does she want to cut her hair? I think not, she would have taken out the hair extensions if that was the case. Enough said, let's follow her.

We skip through the door just in time to see her disappear through another, smaller door. Now this is interesting. Let's take a look.

Oh, no wonder. The inner room is atattoo parlour! I kid you not, if I had a jaw, I would scratch it. Please feel free to scratch yours, or at least rub it, if it will not bear scratching. Is she looking for someone, or does she want to get one?

The guys inside are a nasty bunch. One of them, a slim, ugly hoodlum with a crazed look in his eye, is looking her over, and another one, an ugly hulk with bulging muscles and even more tattoos than muscles, is talking to her. Dear reader, this place is disturbing. There is a haze of smoke in the air, which, from the glazed looks of some of the patrons inside and out, is from more than just cigarettes. What little of the wall we can see is covered in graffiti, and the rest is covered in posters of a most distasteful sort.

Okorowanta, shame on you, you can't even narrate a scene. You should leave it to me, I'm the pro at such things. There's colourful graffiti on the walls, obscenities even I can't say, and posters of people having tattoos or piercings on all parts of their bodies. There's a poster of a lady who pierced her eyelid, Eew! Can you do that? Why would anyone want to do that? I wonder how she sleeps. If an eyelid is pierced, what's the point closing the eye if the eyelid cannot protect the eye from the things it is supposed to? Can such a person still sleep?

Okrofo, you dwell too much on irrelevant things. Why not talk about the eyes of the tattoo guy as they rove so eagerly over her? Or talk about the change in his stance? Why is he suddenly sitting down, and cradling a bag in his lap? He's attracted to her, isn't it?

Greatly too, see his eyes? I'd bet, if I could, that there are a thousand other places he could keep that bag, other than on his laps, if he's not hiding a bulge on his crotch. Hmmm, dear reader, maybe it will be easier to understand from your point of view. Some people project an image of steel and hardness that is just a front for helplessness and need? That's the girl in a nutshell. And if you can think of a person who thrives on dominating and oppressing others, and getting an almost sexual thrill out of it, a sick, demented sadist, then you can think of the kind of person the tattoo guy is.

I wish we could look into his mind and see the ideas coursing through it. He's obviously aroused by the fact that in a not too distant time the young girl will deliberately put herself in his power, and he will be at liberty to cause her pain. He's twisted, sick. But this is not about him, is it, Okrofo?

No, Okorowanta, it is not. And as the girl who is our primary target turns on her heel and leaves the shop, so also we must turn and run. While it is true that he can not see or harm us, we would not have you in close proximity to him for one second longer than necessary.

She's on a bike, so it's up, up, and away we go, riding in the hair extensions that reach the small of her back. She's heading into the campus, so let's tag along, shall we? She alights from the bike at the school gate, and we equally alight from the slipstream, and as she hands the bike man the two green bills (twenties, remember? green equals twenty), we jump from her shoulder to land in her purse. Stuffy place, this, with keys, dirty naira notes, tissues, lip gloss, and at least two or three dead ants. But we really have no physical needs, so fortunate. Her phone is not here, any clues, Okoro?

Ungainly reprobate, my name is not Okoro, it is Okorowanta. Climb out of the purse, pass under the arm, and, - oh, don't bother; she's bringing it out of her hip pocket. I wonder what you want with her phone; you have no physical form, so you cannot possibly look through it.

At least I can sit on her shoulder and see her use it.

Suit yourself. As for me, and you too, dear reader, we can hang on the pendant of her necklace and peer at the phone from between her breasts.

Lecher! Pervert! You're not even male, and yet no other spot appeals to you than to nestle between her breasts.

I'm doing it for the view, not for any reasons you may be thinking.

Yes! My sentiments exactly! The view, right?

Retard! I don't like to ogle breasts; I just mean I can see her phone better from here. Apologies dear reader, we must get on with our spying. Where were we, now?

Aha, the view, yes. She's scrolling through her BBM contacts, checking their updates, whatever they mean; I think she's just restless. Hold on; hold on, she's coming off the bus. Faculty of arts, I think, nice building, let's wait for her to go in, it's not like she's wasting time or something.

Look, she's going upstairs, it's almost noon, and apart from a few cursory hellos to people she meets on the stairs, she makes this journey in silence. Dear reader, tarry awhile as we hover behind her, the trail should end soon. Aha, here

we are, Dr. B. A. Warson, Dept of English and Literature. She knocks at the door, and hesitates, waiting for a response.

Gleefully, dear reader, we have no such restrictions, and we can dance through the door as if it were air. Thus we get our first view of the office behind the door.

It is a fairly large office, with bookshelves covering one wall, and another large bookshelf almost dividing the office in two, such that the person inside, behind the large desk, is not the first thing you see upon entering...

And at his prompting, she enters. She goes to one side of the partition, and crosses to the inner section, just as he hits the space bar on his computer to pause the video he's watching. There's a glitter in his eyes that has nothing to do with the spectacles on his nose, and his eyes, which are darting constantly between the screen and the student- she is a student, plus the rate of breathing, and the slight flaring of the nostrils, tells you that this is a thoroughly unscrupulous fellow. A quick peek at the screen confirms what I'm sure you suspected; the randy lecturer was watching a dirty movie and is torn between the passive enjoyment of the movie and the prospect of some action with the lass in front of him. He is a plump, balding man, with sagging jowls and beady eyes. His hands are pudgy, with rather nice fingers, and he is a good dresser. Starched white shirt, no tie, there is some sort of badge or medal on his chest, near his left shoulder. The belt, or what we can see of it under his bulging stomach, is good quality leather, and the shoes are brown wing tips.

Okorowanta, while you were prattling, I took the time to listen in on his conversation with the girl. It seems the girl is not happy with her grades in a certain course, and apparently he has the power to influence it so her score gets upgraded, or something of the sort, but the man wants his back rubbed, and by the glint in his eyes and the porn he is watching, it is not exactly hard to guess what kind of favours he means to exact from the girl. She seems surprisingly amenable to his plans, and she types out his number as he spells it out for her. Makes one wonder, doesn't it?

Okrofo, don't sit there wondering. She's heading for the bank of Automated Teller Machines (atms) at one end of the car park. She's in the queue, and I'm guessing she wants to withdraw money. If you recall, we did not see much money in her purse. Okay, her card goes in, her pin is 6-3-3-4, and we're seeing all the formal stuff that these machines give their users before they allow them access money. She withdraws ten thousand, and the machine coughs up the cash after a

few more chirps and beeps. We're with her, and we cannot help but notice the interested stares that trail her as she walks slowly to the bus park where she had alighted. From a bus only twenty minutes previously. Humans! It seems they have only one thing on their minds all the time.

Dear reader, please pay Okorowanta no mind, he has been around humans too long, or not long enough, so he tends to ramble. I'm sure you are sufficiently discerning as to know how much of his words to take as fact, and how much to discard. We dance in front of the driver as she enters the bus, settle among the dust motes on the dashboard, and study the other passengers. There's a young man with dark glasses and a scraggly beard, a girl next to him with fake eyelashes over an inch long; was the eyelid, I wonder, designed to bear such loads? The driver, eyes fixed on the road, shakes his head vigorously at a passing fly or some other pest, and we get a view of his ears, chock full of wax and running over. Evidently personal hygiene is not one of his strong points.

Our principal focus has taken out her phone from her hip pocket, and we must try to find out what she is up to. She's typing fast, fingers crawling over the keypad like hungry ants over the ground, and just as we flit over to her seat in the back, she hits the send button. And it just so happens that the message recipient is Dr. B.A. Warson, of the English Department, whose number she so recently collected. Hmm, interesting conversation, judging from the way she shielded her phone from other passengers while typing. The bus pulls up at the main gate, and she disembarks, taking care to pull her top over her behind, somewhat needlessly, since she's the last person to leave, and there's nobody behind her to ogle her behind. She's waiting for the bus boy, or conductor, as he is commonly called around here, to give her the balance, and already she's casting eyes hither and yon, maybe she is looking for a bike. Then again, I could be wrong.

Okrofo, for once you were right. She's telling the bike man, and she doesn't haggle over the price, but mounts the bike right away. From our perch on her shoulder, we can smell the bike man's unwashed body, his dirty clothes, a faint whiff of alcohol as he comments about the weather, which is a bit cloudy but let's hope it does not rain, and the perfume the girl is wearing. Life is indeed a mishmash of odours, so many in such a short space of time. The bike is pulling

up in front of Eddy's world, the barbershop cum tattoo parlour, and we are still perched on her shoulder when she turns to mount the steps and enter the doors. There is a flash of purple, and looking ahead we see another member of the typical barbershop crowd returning to his seat. There is a sound system, with huge speakers blaring hip hop and rap music. She enters and says a polite hello, and crosses to the portal leading to the tattooist's domain. We must join her there, isn't it? The two places smell different, and there is-

There is a whole lot of meaningless noise you're making, Okorowanta! You fail to mention the tattooist's quick intake of breath as she enters, and the accidental nick he makes on the left bicep of the guy he's currently working on. The guy yelps, and he realises, with a guilty start, that he is ruining someone's body art. He grabs a hand towel on a stool nearby, and dabs at the nick, while, at a table nearby, our mutual friend has grabbed paper and pencil, and is trying to sketch a design. People are allowed to design their own body art, it seems, and we join you to suppose that there must be limits to that. An exceptional artist, a Da Vinci or Bosch, would have the tattooist in trouble trying to replicate the design on his skin.

So flitting off to her, and cutting Okrofo off in his speech, we land on her shoulder, and peer down at the symbols she's putting down on the paper. It's an intricate design, very nice, but it had better be bigger if it is going to be seen and appreciated. Which brings the question, where is she going to put the tattoo? As she sketches, it is becoming a bit clearer, and we can see now that she's spelling out a word, concealing it in calligraphy and design.

L. O. V. E.

While she sketches her design, pausing now and again to pick another pen and add a splash of color, the tattooist has since finished his work on the biceps of the guy, and most of the other denizens of the tattoo parlour have seized the chance and discreetly excused themselves, leaving her with the tattooist. She does not notice, so engrossed is she in her drawing, which is looking better by the minute, and when he leans over her shoulder and touches her arm, she is startled, and the spell is broken. He picks up the paper, and begins to replicate the design on a plain sheet, asking occasional questions to ensure accuracy in the rendition of the details.

While the tattooist draws, let's take you on a tour of the room, shall we? The door opens inward, half wood and half glass, the door itself, and more than half the walls, covered in posters of different celebrities and models showing different kinds of body art. Tattoos, piercings, you name it. There's a picture of a bare-chested guy in dreadlocks and baggy jeans, skin covered in so many tattoos it's impossible to figure out which of them exactly he is showing off. There are pictures of people with pierced noses, lips, ears, nipples, navels, tongues, (Eew! That must have hurt) and a picture, of some lady with a ring somewhere on her genitalia. The picture is from the chest down, thankfully.

Enough of the room, Okorowanta, what is going on in the room is far more interesting, and it is to this we must turn our attention, as the girl, with her top pulled up to just under her breasts, is lying down on the reclining chair, and the tattooist is making preliminary sketches on her belly. I don't know whether to really call it her belly as such, since her jeans are unzipped and we can clearly see a pair of purple panties, just above which the tattooist is doing his work. There is a gleam in his eyes that is not entirely due to the fragrant herbs that we can all assume he has been inhaling, if not firsthand, then secondhand at least. We can commend his sense of discipline, stretched as it must be by the girl's state of undress, or his devotion to his work, or the simple knowledge that he will not get the money if he does not do the job, and do it well at that.

Okrofo, focus on the girl, and leave the tattooist alone! She winces with each jab, each line, each stroke of his tool, but she stays put, unflinching, not moving, even when the man, in a move that is supposed to be sexy but only comes off as predatory, uses his tongue to lap at her skin, from just under the breasts through the tattoo in progress to the waistband of her panties, using his stubble-rough jaw to rub against her mound, and leaving a clear indication of what else he would like to do to her, but she says not a word. And at this point you are free to shake your head at her silent endurance of his ministrations. As the tattoo nears completion, he refrains from using the towel, and uses his tongue more often. If she gets the message, she gives no sign, lying limply on the recliner.

All too soon (for him I'm sure) the tattoo is done, and he cleans his tools and returns them to the sterilizing cabinet, as she inspects the results in the mirror. The skin is swollen and bruised, and the results may not look so good at first,

but she accepts a couple of tissues he hands her, and adjusts her panties so the waistband holds them in place. She pulls down her top, and rearranges herself carefully, favouring the bruised areas.

For once, Okorowanta, let us allow them both talk, while we listen.

“So tell me, why did you choose ‘love’ as your tattoo?”

“Not love, as you think, it’s L.O.V.E, an acronym.”

“Yeah, yeah, most people do a name, or a flower, or Chinese characters, or something else, you know, something significant. Like a Bible verse or, you know, something, like a heart, or a name.”

“I told you, it’s short for “Lasciate Ogni speranza, Voi ch’Entrate”.

Okrofo, She speaks in a fluid, lilting way, and her voice has a certain musical quality, as though she were singing, or close to tears.

Okorowanta, Shhhh!

“Sounds nice, what is it? Greek? “

“Latin. It’s from Dante’s Divine Comedy. A book.”

“Hmmm, sounds nice tell me more. What’s the meaning?”

“In the book, it was inscribed at the gate of hell, and it means ‘Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here’.”

“Whoa, whoa, so why is it special to you?”

“I have HIV. I just found out yesterday.”

And as she turns to leave, dear reader, so also we must leave with her, and even though she ‘s pulling out her phone to check who is calling (it’s Dr. Warson), we can still hear him retching as he tries to get rid of all her blood that he has been licking. Taking a deep breath, she presses the green button.

“Hello Sir, where are you.....”

Here we leave you, dear reader. Go back to your work.

Zaina's Song

by Enock I. Simbaya

[VERSE ONE]

Up the hill, a black bird circled, probably hunting a rodent or small reptile. Zaina felt like that, not the bird but the prey, hunted, stalked. Mother was sick; Father was two years already gone. Death was hunting her life, taking away her family. First it had been Uncle Benson, then Grandmother. She had loved them both, the way they made her feel, every day a joy to spend with them. But the sickness, like the bird, came and took them away. Then it took Father, as strong and willed as he had been. He fought, he gave it his all. But it was stronger, eating him up till he was as thin as a reed and as light as a sack of potatoes. He went, died; his face and voice now only memories in her head.

Now Mother, sweet oh sweet Mother. The first symptoms were showing: spots on the cheek. Nothing to worry about, Mother said, Had them in my youth. But Zaina knew those spots. They all had them before the coughing and dizziness and weight loss and the forever sleep. Mother wouldn't admit it.

But the coughing started. And Zaina knew she had to find the old woman on the hill. Witch she was called. Deathly Hag, the village named her. But in secret people visited her, said she healed good. They said, when you look into her eyes, you see terror and fire. They said, I never dream well since she touched me. They said, her ugliness is the stuff of lifelong nightmares. But they also whispered that she knew things, could heal things.

So Zaina went, in the morning before the sun awoke. Before

Mother awoke. She carried with her the blue water bucket. Mother would know she's gone to the river. But she ran to the hill, west to where the sun went to hide at night. She ran up, heart drumming a dirge.

A shabby hut stood in the centre of a clearing. It was rather peaceful looking, the rising sun shining down upon it. Zaina had pictured darkness and a grove of crooked moss-teemed trees, the hut a black monster in shifting shadows. But the morning wind blew in a wide open space. Chickens pecked, pigs snorted, a cat pounced.

Blossoming flowers coloured a strip, okra grew on its green bushes. Not a horror, a welcome.

Zaina walked to the hut as her eyes wandered at the place. The cat stopped to gaze warily at her, continued it's romping. The black bird was a white-chested crow, still circling above. The fear in her heart was melting away, hope rising.

Please please, she whispered. To herself. To hope. To the witch whom she hadn't seen yet. Was she ugly? Was she better or worse or sweeter or nastier than in her imagination, than in the tales?

She tapped on the door.

Here? a voice called. It was a sweet voice, stern, motherly.

Yes *Mayo*, Zaina replied.

Is that a girl? The voice said, excited. There was rushing inside, a bumping into things. A clay pot or plate broke. The door swished open. A sweet face looked at her. Old, wrinkly, but not ugly. Old, wrinkly, but not scary. And spotted on the cheeks... Zaina gasped. The old woman had the same dark spots as Mother.

[VERSE TWO]

Sweet girl, welcome! The witch was delighted. How I have longed for someone like you to come. It's men and boys who come, and they have no grace like you do. You have brought beauty and healing to this place.

But Zaina was backing away. It was hopeless. The witch would die soon, Mother would die soon. It was hopeless.

Fear not, little girl. I won't harm you. She gave her hand,
Zaina backed away more.

You have it too, the girl said. She started crying.

No, no, please, the old woman begged. It will not do for you to cry.

But how can you help my mother if you have the same sickness?

Please come in, I will show you how. She looked around, as if to make sure no one was watching. Closed the door. It was a quaint hut, lit through a window. Little furnishings, a sleeping mat in the middle.

Hush now, sweet girl. Will you take some *munkoyo*?

Zaina accepted the cup in both hands, a cup overflowing. She looked at the drink. Are you a witch? She asked.

Look at me, the old woman said, And tell me what you see.

The face: old, wrinkly, but not ugly. Old, wrinkly, but not scary.

Are you a witchdoctor then?

The old woman laughed. None of those, my girl. I do know the stories that people spread in the village down the hill. I know also other things... Her voice became a whisper: I know you can sing.

Zaina shook her head. She indeed had a voice for singing, but she knew no songs. She hummed along to Mother's hum. But she knew no songs.

It is your singing your mother needs, said the old woman who was not a witch.

Zaina shook her head. She did not understand.

Songs heal, my girl. Songs permeate the deep, songs change the heart. In every village, there is one who sings, and her songs can colour the sky, make the flowers bloom with more beauty. She can soothe the heart, bring smiles, make life wonderful. In this village, you are that one.

Is it true, *Mbuya*? Zaina asked.

It is. The lack of songs has brought this fever, the spots and the coughing and the dying. I see it now after so many who have come

to me, but I cannot help them. Find the songstress, I said to myself. If there is none here, find her from another place. But you have come to me! But I know no songs. I made to look for you this very day. When you knocked on my door and spoke, I knew it was you. What a great joy. Sing now, dear girl, sing for me.

But I know no songs! Zaina began to cry.

Hush now, Child. She patted her on the shoulder. Only Sing.

And what song will I sing? Mother didn't teach me the one she hums.

You only need to start. Sing from your heart. Sing for your dear old grandmother.

Zaina looked at the old woman, her face was serious, wordlessly imploring. Zaina opened her mouth, closed it again. Only the hum came out. She hummed fervently, searching her heart and her mind and the old woman's face for the words. They poured out of her mouth soon enough.

[CHORUS]

*The Dark is fading out
The Sun is shining through
And I can spread my wings and fly
The weight of pain is gone
The trouble is done
Drifting away in the wind
And I am free, oh I am free
Yes I am free, Oh I am free*

[BRIDGE]

When she sang it again, life effused, passion flowed, energy moved. The old woman closed her eyes and right there the spots were

vanishing. Her face became clean. Old, wrinkly, but clean of the death.

And so Zaina ran down the hill, with the blue bucket in her hand. She ran down the hill, with the cat following her. She ran down the hill, with the white-chested crow flying above her. So she ran down the hill, singing the song of her own making.

She saw Mother coming towards her.

Mummy!

Zaina, where have you been?

Mummy!

Zaina, I was so worried!

Mummy, I have it, I have the best news.

Zaina, talk sense you silly girl. Have you been to see the...? Zaina embraced Mother when she got close, cutting off her words. What is it, girl? What is this news you have for me? Zaina looked at Mother's face, and she began to sing.

[REPEAT CHORUS]

Exhibit One

By Mystique-Syn O. Osuchukwu.

RUKEVWE:

Murder is a difficult task. It involves a lot of planning and strategy. Maybe I should say getting away with murder is a difficult task. Do not fall for those films that portray the Police on this side of the divide in a bad light and almost all its endings are about how fickle they are and how the whole system sucks. Do not also fall for how the American Police (NYPD in particular) can piece together clues and within minutes or days, even the craftiest of criminals get caught. They always get caught. Why? Are there not unsolved murder cases in the United States of America? How come they never show us those cases? Well, I digress.

I intend to get away with this murder. I am not going to take chances. I plan to execute it so perfectly that even if you use this story as an exhibit, you would have a hard time convincing a jury I killed Mr. Ejiro Elliot. I'm going to do it slowly, that way, I can look into his eyes and he will know why. He needs to know I am doing this because of love. I am doing this because of my sister.

IVIE:

I knew the exact moment Rukevwe decided to carry out the deed. Perhaps I wouldn't have executed it myself but I will assist in any way I can. For years, I have known that my sister will do anything for me. That is the way love should be. Selfless and encompassing. Love should make you want to be a better person for the other person. It should make you want to do anything for the other person. Jesus died, didn't He? That is the highest manifestation of love, right? The way Rukevwe can do anything for me is the same way I can do anything for her. Anything, including being an accessory to the murder of my husband. She won't let him live. Deep down, I know this.

It started when I was twelve. I had just come back from school and was writhing in bed due to stomach pains. I was scared I was dying. If I wasn't dying, why was blood trickling down my legs? Why were the boils on my chest hurting? My cries had brought someone

into the room. A dark haired tall girl with eyes as big as saucers. She had Mama's nose and full lips, thick, like the *kpomo* Mama Ade sold down the street.

"Where is your mother?" the stranger said.

"She went out with Uncle Jimmy".

Mama and Uncle Jimmy had gone out for another weekend in a row. My housemates were the lizards roaming the ceiling and the lullaby-singing mosquitoes at night.

"Your mother is my mother", the stranger said to me.

All I knew was that help had come. With tear filled eyes, I told her that I was dying. She took one look at my naked body and bloody thighs and said, "Na man touch you?" her eyes darting frantically, here and there. "You allow man touch you for dia? Abi na force dem force you?"

I shook my head no and managed to reply her with bated breath. "It started in school. I just started bleeding. My friends said I should run home and report to my mother but she's not here. She went out with Uncle Jimmy".

"Who's Uncle Jimmy?"

"He's my uncle. He's one of the numerous uncles' that come to look for Mama".

Looking around the room, she noticed the cracked walls and darkened corners littered with cigarette stubs. She bundled me, blood and all, into the bathroom, a makeshift corner with plywood providing pseudo privacy. When she was done, she wrapped me with the only wrapper she could find. It reeked of different odors. Rushing outside, she came back with a pack of something wrapped in black nylon. 'Put this on, it's a pad. You are not dying but you will do so in this pig sty. You are menstruating'. She took care of me that weekend

and before she left, she said to me, “No need telling your mother I was here. I guess she will be better staying out of my life”.

I never told Mama anything and I never asked Mama why she had a daughter that didn’t live with us. One day, while cradling a bottle of whiskey, Mama confessed to me that she had had a child when she was sixteen. The father, a preacher who had come to conduct a crusade left before he knew of the pregnancy. She had tried aborting the fetus but the doctors never really did a good job and the baby kept growing unharmed. The baby was given out to a relative. Mama never knew that Rukevwe had come calling and had been in my life for a while.

Rukevwe and I developed a relationship from the day she found me on the bed. I went to her little one room apartment anytime Mama travelled with Uncle Jimmy or Uncle John or Chief Silas. Rukevwe became my mother and she taught me many things. Many things like pressing my breasts and fondling my private parts. She said that if I loved her then everything I had was hers as well. She made me touch her too. Sometimes, I did not like it but it is Rukevwe, my sister, and I will do anything for her.

Ejiro Elliot came into my life and introduced me to a life different from the one Rukevwe had shown me. I knew what it was for someone of the opposite sex to pay me attention much more than Rukevwe did. Ejiro’s body was different from Rukevwe’s. He did not force me to do things even when I balked. Even when all I spoke of was Rukevwe. He proposed when I was twenty and I accepted. I was scared of what my sister would say and I kept it to myself for a while. I wanted to know what the other side felt like. It was a whirlwind courtship that Rukevwe frowned at. She brought up obstacle after obstacle on why I shouldn’t be with Ejiro. “Men are useless”, she said. “They have nothing to offer but heartache. Listen to me, I’m your sister. I love you.” Mama was out of my life by then. She had followed Alhaji Lukmon on a trip and she never came back. She never came back for me.

Ejiro once asked me why Rukevwe was so possessive of me but I told him that smoldering care was better than nonexistent love. Rukevwe was my rock. I love her.

Everything changed when Ejiro decided his brand of Christianity was lukewarm and it deserved to be pulled up a notch. By then, we were married for three months. He was watching TV one day and got carried away by the preaching; tears pooling at his eyes at the end of the program. After attending the preacher's service on Sunday, he came home in a fit, shouting at me and raising his fists in a drunken rage.

"You pawn of the devil. Don't you know that wearing trousers offends God?"

"You never bothered about this before", I said, expressing my shock.

"My pastor says Deuteronomy 22vs 5 says; A woman must not wear men's clothes and a man must not wear women's clothes."

"Your pastor says or the Bible says?"

"Don't talk back at me. The Pastor would like to see you tomorrow."

"Why?"

His eyes darted away. "Nothing. He wants to talk to you about a couple of things. To say some prayers and talk. And then, about Rukevwe."

"What has Rukevwe got to do with this?"

"The relationship you have with her is not normal. It's not...healthy. She bugs me every night and day; wanting to know how I treat her sister. Why can't she stay out of our lives? Listen. I have told the man of God everything. All you need to do is go see him and hear what he has to say. "

"I never told you I have a problem with Rukevwe".

“Yes, you do!”

“No, I don’t!”

That was how it started. Ejiro changed and became a fanatic, taking his pastor’s word as law. Then came the emotional battery. It was never physical but then, one didn’t need the blows, scarred faces and swollen lips to show signs of abuse. Ejiro became a pastor and I began to see less and less of him. Then one day, he came back and demanded conjugal rights. I told him I had miscarried that morning and was in pains. He told me his pastor said women were supposed to be silent. He said it was somewhere in the Bible. He took me forcefully, stating that somewhere in the Bible too was a place that read that women in marriages should never claim marital rape. I ran back to Rukevwe, my rock and told her everything. It was as if she had been expecting me. She dried my eyes and told me that she would take care of it. I never should have left her. I know what she wants to do. It’s time.

EJIRO:

My wife does not understand me. I’m doing this for her good. It’s not right to have the kind of love Ivie has for Rukevwe. They do not know but I have seen them. I have seen them doing things that sisters should not do. At first, when we started courting I thought it as the love one had for a mother figure but as time went on, I began to realize that the love the sisters had was nothing close to normal. I couldn’t compete.

I did this for her because I love her. I went closer to God, didn’t I? I feel like it’s my fault she didn’t outgrow the feelings she has for Rukevwe. I failed. As a man and as a husband. It was as if everything I did was never enough. Rukevwe was always forefront in her thoughts. It was always ‘Rukevwe this, Rukevwe that’. I felt it in her body when we were having marital relations that she was never present. When I met Pastor Akpore, I thought he could cast out whatever was wrong with her but it turned out his methods depressed her and caused her to hate me.

I hate seeing the pain in her eyes. I hate seeing the love fade slowly away. I can't compete. Perhaps I should have a talk with Rukevwe and tell her that she has won.

RUKEVWE:

Ejiro demanded to see me and the day is here. I must make sure that his murder is not traced to me. I have decided to go with 'Death by asphyxiation'. Choking should do the work very well. If the directive is to be believed, all I need to do is to create a simple blockage from the presence of foreign materials to his respiratory organ. This will impede the oxygen supply to his tissue and organs which will lead to the actual choking. See? Murder involves careful planning.

I have decided to use rat poison. Something cheap and easily accessible on the streets of Warri. Now, this is how to prepare it. Take a teaspoon (not more than a teaspoon as more will expose the disguised smell.) Put it in a cup of chocolate. Heated chocolate. Then add a drop of lemon to completely disguise the taste. Lastly, dip a heated tea bag in hot water and add a dollop of butter. Don't ask me what this one does. I know it is part of the killing process. Lastly, and most importantly, serve with a slice of homemade bread or cake. Duly laced with cement. Death is always sure with swallowed cement.

Ejiro came and sat at the extreme corner of my sofa. He is a handsome man. In another life, perhaps my tastes would run that way but in this life, I need to be with my sister and care for her like our mother never did. I need to be there for her. To show her love and be there for her especially away from that Bible-thumping demon-casting discriminating and condemning husband of hers. I always thought Christianity preached love and acceptance irrespective of religious beliefs and sexual orientations. Yet, Ejiro's Christianity was worlds apart from that of the founder. Who was he to condemn? Was love not the message? Love your neighbor as yourself and perhaps your sister more, right?

I watched him as he sipped his hot chocolate. At first, he winced and then looked at me. His stare focused on my face, a bit hesitant but drinking nonetheless.

“You know, Ivie will resent you when she discovers that selfishness is your motive. Does she know that it’s all for revenge? Does she know that the love you have for her is not healthy? And that it’s just a ploy to get back at your mother for deciding to keep her and not you?”

“She doesn’t need to know. She’s so in love with me that she will never believe a word of what you just said here. Besides, she’s not here. I don’t plan to tell her and neither will you”.

“And the preacher? Why did you make me wreck him? What did he do?”

“Apart from spurting nonsense and being a hypocrite, he was the father that abandoned me. He needed to be taught a lesson. It is not okay to sleep with young girls or commit adultery and then act holier than thou before a congregation. Practice what you preach was the lesson. That rape charge should stick. He should be in jail for a long while.”

“You know, I knew I would face my end when I came here. I drank your hot chocolate and ate your cake, knowing its contents. You know, I’m sure Ivie never told you but we had a good marriage until you started your schemes. She loves me genuinely, something you can never understand. Sleeping with you was the worst mistake of my life. Without that piece of blackmail, I would have made my marriage work”.

I pictured Ejiro’s blood thinning and then reducing its ability to clot. I pictured him bleed internally and then choke slowly to death. Mission accomplished.

It is time to start life afresh. Ivie was on the other end of the line. Ejiro was wise after all. He had kept his phone on during our

conversation and Ivie had heard everything. Before I could hide the Ejiro's body, the police was at my doorstep with a teary Ivie. She watched as they took me away and she did nothing apart from give me a kiss while I was escorted in handcuffs. I guess this note is the least of my worries now. It wasn't a perfect murder after all.

Ghosts of Kuto

by Afopefoluwa Ojo

Tuesdays are for black. I know because I sat down on the steep stairs of the theatre and counted, and seventy and seven people wore black. Black t-shirts, black jeans, black shoes, black dresses, black sweaters... I counted a girl three times because she passed three times, and I counted the policemen that walked around as many times as I saw them. They wore black.

My daddy was buried on a Tuesday but nobody wore black.

They wore cream agbadas and tied wine geles and danced in circles around men with talking drums, and they called it a celebration of life. They hustled for nylons of rice and goat meat to take home to their own, while my mother buckled underneath her grief. But nobody wore black, not even I. Tuesdays are for black because I counted, and today, seventy and seven people wore black but my mother only cared about us.

Our conversation had gone awry the day I told her I was going to Abeokuta. She had asked what for and I said a festival, and then she said I could not go, so I asked her why, and she said that it was dangerous and I asked her how.

“The ghosts will come for you,” she said.

I bit my tongue so that I would not cuss her out because she was a mess and I was tired of wondering for how long, so I stopped.

There was, as there always was, an exasperated sigh at first, then a clicking of fingers and clucking of tongues from the backseat of the car. It must have been Joshua or David, at different times, each waiting for who would tell our mother first, remind her again that there were no ghosts—neither ghosts of her mother nor her husband—roaming the streets of Lagos. That our father and grandmother were gone and their ghosts were peaceful and resting, not raving.

“Mummy, there are no ghosts.” Joshua, merely a whisper.

“I am still going.” Me, louder.

“You’re not.”

“I am.”

“I said you’re not.”

Quiet.

I had applied for a four-day leave from work although what I really needed was seven. I took the extra three without permission. During the Festival, I opened my work email and see two queries from the human resource manager for negligence of duty and failure to return in proposed time, and I panicked a bit and was angry with myself and my bosses for not being understanding enough. But how much more understanding could I expect from them?

I would resort to enjoying the festival for what it was, and this is what it was: many people, million books, a tiny roommate with a deafening voice who constantly hid his small parts from me, white people and hotel bookings, panel discussions, and broke semi-famous people. Aloneness.

Aloneness because my mother had not called, not once to check on me as I arrived in Kuto. Not even to ask if I had eaten, if the festival people had kept their promise to feed me three times a day. Not to ask what hotel I was staying in, if it was more comfortable than my bed at home, if the food was as delicious as the meals she cooked, if I missed her at all, more than a little. Because this is how we had always been.

And I too had not called her. Not to ask how she was doing, if she was taking her medication and seeing her therapist, if Joshua and David were doing okay even though I could have easily asked them directly, if the ghosts had woken her up from sleep again, screaming, clutching her chest, sweating, hyperventilating since I had been away. Not to ask anything.

I sometimes caught myself staring at my phone, staring at her number, willing myself to dial but my ego would paralyse my fingers so that I would not call and not ask the things that I often thought about. And the truth was that I missed her, but I had left on a bad note with my backpack strapped across my back. I had walked away from her and when I said bye, she had not answered. And when I said bye to my brothers, they hadn't answered either because they were caught up with television. If it was three years ago, I would have cried on my way to the bus stop, but I am grown now and big girls don't cry.

Big girls only cried when their hearts were breaking, but my heart was breaking and I could not cry still. Because I had come for the books after all, and run far away from them since I could afford none. The last time I was around the bookshop, the devil in me had asked me to pick one and leave, that nobody would have seen me.

He might have been right.

“Pick the book and go.”

“Which one?”

“The red and white one. You know the cover screams at you. It looks like blood and milk flowing together. Worthy combination.”

‘Headscarves and Hymens’ was the title of the book. I saw it and thought of four headscarves and four hymens, and then I thought about the author, a red-haired woman. I had sat through one of her panel discussions.

“The revolution is about sex and vaginas,” she had said. “To be woman, to be black, to be queer, is the revolution.” In those moments, I believed her. It was not the things she said, it was how convinced she was about the things that she said. If I had spoken to her that day, the day I sat somewhere in the back and listened to her talk, I was sure to have said nonsense like, “I like your hair. I like your book cover. Unfortunately, I cannot buy it because I cannot afford it. I hear you’re Egyptian, tell me about Egypt. Or don’t. Tell me about yourself.”

But I stayed away from her and I stayed away from the bookshop, because stealing was not so foreign to me, and to be labelled the thieving volunteer of the festival would be a disaster. So I stayed close to the media room and near the cafeteria where I could eavesdrop on conversations I had no business with.

On Wednesday, I overheard a conversation between a young black man and a white woman over their meal of rice, plantain and chicken.

“I don’t understand how we could have sold our own brothers and sisters for money, that’s just terrible. I don’t blame the white people,” he said while the white woman nodded vigorously and the whole discussion made me cringe for the sake of the young black man. I was ashamed for him because I thought that he should have at least been a little less of a sell-out in his judgment. That they should

have discussed something else entirely like the rice and dodo and chicken they were eating or books or travel. They should have left topics that had been so overly discussed that they were now left underneath the sun because they were damp and had mildew growing on their skins.

The conversation I overheard on Thursday was different. My fellow volunteers, Kemi and Steph, were talking about backless dresses like the kind one of the authors had worn that day.

“I wish I had smaller breasts so that I could do without a bra entirely and get away with wearing backless things like TelemaBassey. Bras are just stress,” Steph said.

Kemi had disagreed and insisted that bras were always necessary and that breasts without bras were awkward, sometimes dangly, and Steph had laughed. Steph had a long pointed nose, Caucasian eyes and acne that she would, every morning, douse underneath foundation so that her skin looked like peanut butter. Steph also laughed a lot and possessed a humour that was biting and sarcastic. She seemed to have mastered the art of *Idontcareism*. I liked her and I would have sat at the table with her and Kemi and had lunch with them, but there was no space, so I sat alone. And when they looked over that one time, I waved and they waved back.

Now, Steph would have been my roommate if they had let us choose the people we’d rather spend our nights with. If our supervisor hadn’t strung us up together like shoelaces with random people so that when she had run out of girls to pair, she looked to me and gave me a boy. A man that looked like a boy because he was so short.

And when she asked if it was alright, I couldn’t be the child and say, “No ma, I’m not comfortable having a boy as my roommate,” so I nodded and said yes. When she asked him, he shrugged and said that it was okay, and, for a while, I thought that it would be okay. But he talked too much and his voice was too big for his body, and after walking back together to the hotel for the first two nights and having major arguments about things that did not concern us—like the kinds of personality certain people had—we’d get to the room and turn our backs against each other until I would fall asleep to the sound of his faint snore which finished into a whistle and started all over again. Now, Steph would have been my roommate if they had let us choose

the people we'd rather spend our nights with, but she might not have chosen me back.

If the festival had a soundtrack, it would have been my roommate's big voice, men with talking drums beating away and women ululating to the rhythm begging for money with song. It would have been the constant song of my heart beating, pounding through my chest on the nights that I walked to the hotel alone. These were the nights that I stayed back after all the volunteers had trooped back to their rooms in clusters.

On one of these nights, I had opened my eyes between sleep and caught my roommate staring at me. The expression on his face, my sleepy eyes read as disgust. As hatred. I waddled to the bathroom, peed and came back to the bed, and he was still looking at me in a way that I considered strange. In the way minds can fall asleep along with bodies, I fell back asleep thinking about why my roommate was plotting my death, about how my mother had warned me to be wary of such things.

I decided that I must confront him.

"Why were you looking at me funny? Last night? I woke up and saw you looking at me strangely."

He cocked his eyebrows

"Don't pretend like you're not understanding me, I saw you."

"You were talking in your sleep," he said, "again."

"Again?"

"Yes, for the past two nights." He laughed.

"What was I saying?"

"Something about a baby, a mother, a ghost. Then you said my name."

"Did I say 'my name' or did I say Kafka?"

He laughed. "Of course you said Kafka. Which one is my name? No, you didn't say 'my name'. You said Kafka, which is my name. Funny girl."

"That is because you were one of them!"

"One of who?"

Quiet.

"One of who, eh? Tell me."

Quiet.

“Ba wahala,” he said. He entered the shower and slammed the door.

There had been sculptures of heroes of Kuto, big brown heads of governors and politicians, lined along the walls of the exhibition hall with big smiling faces on small mantles. There had been the big black statue of the big black athlete like Jesse Owens. He stood in an athletic pose in front of the sports centre on a large mantle. He was the fastest man alive and his skin stretched with taut muscles and sharp edges. These statues, during the day, decorated Kuto with life, and I would run my fingers along their hard faces and make up hero stories about all twenty of them. But at night they sucked in breath, grew souls and haunted. There had been my father. There had been Kafka. All chasing me in the dream so that I had to run and run and run and then hide because Jesse Owens was too fast for me. I crawled underneath old cars and hid there till the morning.

On Friday morning, I heard Kafka brushing his teeth through the walls of the bathroom. I could always tell when he was brushing his teeth because of how he gagged and brushed too thoroughly as though he had eaten cat poop in his dreams. He will avoid me for the rest of the festival; never walk to the hotel with me, never walk to the event centre with me, never argue with me. I had loosened up a bit more, become closer to Steph and her friend, drank a bit more and danced a bit more and I missed Kafka. He was a condescending small man but I missed him the way one would miss a best friend.

He avoided me till today, our last day at Kuto, when all of us woke up with clouds like melancholy hanging over our heads as if God himself had woken up earlier than the rest of us and created individual sadness like *here's one for you, here's one for you, another for you and oh, don't think I forgot you, here's your own sadness, everyone gets a sadness!*

While we packed our bags and prepared to leave what we had come to enjoy, to return to the lives that we had needed vacations from, Kafka removed one book from his stash and handed it over to me. I remembered how, one day, he had asked me why I hadn't bought any books and I had shrugged as though I didn't care much for books and he had smirked as though *you liar* and I had hated him for that.

I said thank you, for the book. And he smiled a tiny smile. We did not exchange numbers or promise to keep in touch. We did not

hug as I mounted the bus that would return me home. I started reading the book on the journey back but fell asleep with my index finger between the pages.

When I got home, my mother did not welcome me. She was lying on her bed and her head was turned upwards towards the ceiling. I sat beside her and she was still for moments as though I was not there. When she looked at me, it was in the way a mother looks at her prodigal child. Her eyes only said, *you are a prodigal daughter*. They said, *you are as bad as they come*.

She asked if the ghosts came for me and I nodded and said that they did. She looked at me thoroughly then. She was more interested. I told her that there was something I bought for her. I searched through my bag and handed her the book that Kafka gave me. Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'.

"Befitting title for a befitting woman," I said.

She did not smile.

The Fall

By Shannon Hopkins

Before he opened his eyes, David was aware of the pounding of the sea on the shore. The seventh wave made the windows of the building beside which he slept shudder in their rusty frames, like an old man's teeth, loose in his skull.

The boom of the waves echoed around him, accentuated by the acoustics of the building, oddly creating a sense of calm as well as dis-ease. The soothing sound of the roll of its waves versus its enormous, reckless body - a disturbing paradox of safety and destruction.

The smell of salt and old seaweed was strong, and the dense, humid air that held one in its arms like one would a child, was comforting, warm.

David always felt odd being away from the sea. The silence of its absence, or replacement sounds of traffic, people, inertia, left him cold. Waking up to the never ceasing sound of the sea, at least he knew he was 'home'.

As he lay on the cold paving, the cardboard and newspaper nest creating but a small relief, even in the summer, he became aware of his body - stiff, sore, hung over. He could still taste the cheap wine in his mouth, somewhat more fermented now and vile. He felt ill at the taste.

Slowly he forced open his gummy eyes. They burned at the hard midmorning light. He hated that more than anything, the way the sun burnt his eyes, like acid.

When they adjusted, he saw in front of him, beyond the overflowing rubbish bin, the sea, the black rocks, fishermen, white children in long-sleeved swimming gear clutching their buckets and spades. Everyday life. Peculiar how it never really changed. Only technology, development, clothing fashion and information changed the human landscape, otherwise it had been exactly the same as when he was a boy. Some people still ignored him, some people still gave him bread, and some people still gave him money and then wondered if they had done the right thing for days thereafter.

He sat up and looked around.

It is a watery day. The kind of day I like the least. A lean day. People are less likely to assist when the weather is poor. They feel cheated of happiness as it is. It will be a hard day. I should not have drunk the whole bottle of wine last night. I should not have spent the night with the others, they are bad for me. But otherwise I would have been alone. And the woman, Esperanza, I would not have seen her. Esperanza...

David got to his feet, wobbled, went to relieve himself beside the bin. Went in search of a tap to wash his face and hands.

He looked down at his clothes. His checked blue shirt and faded jeans were still quite clean, he could get away with one more day's wear with them.

The water was cool and reviving on his creeping skin. He felt more himself after the rinse, and drinking deeply of the water's coolth. Often he thought that even if he had all the money in the world he would still drink mostly water. No other drink ever gave the freshness it did, the thirst-quenching luxuriousness. It was better than any wine, especially after indulging in too much of the latter.

He was sort of hungry, but did not feel like eating. He had half a loaf and some apricot jam still in his bag. He could have a slice later. If only there was butter, there is nothing so satisfying to a hungry belly as the delicious simplicity of bread and butter.

I first saw Esperanza a week after my first visit to this town. It was then I decided I would always come back here, so long as she was here, and even if she was not. The memory of her once being here would be enough. Each time I look forward to one more chance to try to make her love me. I make her laugh, and that is as good as bread and butter on a warm sunny morning.

When I first saw her, she was sitting on a rock beside the sea as the sun came up. She was eating oysters fresh out of the sea, it being a spring low tide. She had long braids down to her waist, and she wore a dress of olive green, draping her full woman's body like a toga. The sun created an auburn halo about her head, and her dark skin glowed in the early light. Her dusky beauty and self-confidence made her look like a goddess of the underworld, a modern-day Persephone, plucking the fruits of the sea.

I had never seen anything so fantastical.

David returned to his cardboard and newspaper nest, to sit and rest, to observe, to think.

He could not really remember what it was like to sleep beneath a roof, on a soft bed. To watch the news on television in the evenings and read the papers in the taxi on the way to work. It had been so long. From homelessness he had sprung and to homelessness he had returned. Some people managed to escape their birth-lot, but he had not been able to. He had worked so hard, years of scrimping and saving, studying, taking the opportunities given to him, until one day they ran out, and he ran out of fuel to pursue the ephemeral 'something more' that people seek with so much anxious dedication.

He missed his days as a teacher, before the school had had to close. He loved the children, their milk chocolate faces and gleaming eyes turned towards him in their hunger for knowledge, for a different life. And he especially loved the study and teaching of languages.

But that was all a long way in the past.

Now he had the whole world. The whole world was his living room, his study, the ever-changing sea his television when he grew tired of thinking and living.

He looked at his hands, now rough, no longer young, but still strong. He could still do something with these hands. The only question was what. Who would take him on now, after his long, graceless fall? Not just anyone.

And Esperanza, she would not take me on as her lover, her partner. She still has higher aspirations for herself. Higher standards. Dreams and goals.

She still has her wings. Why would she want to be grounded in a cardboard nest with an old dodo like me?

As he sits and the day passes, other homeless men and women walk by from time to time. Some carry large bags. Some carry small bags. Some carry nothing at all, the ones who have nothing more to lose in this world.

Some he can see are still wide-eyed and frightened, the newly homeless, others are stolid and resigned to their state of being.

He eats his bread and apricot jam, still besides the dilapidated building by the sea where he awoke. He shares some if it with an old woman who is waiting for a bus that will take her back to her rural home. She had to come to town to see the doctor, get medication.

‘What illness bothers you, *Ma?*’

‘Just being old.’

She gums the bread and jam around in her toothless mouth. Her face is like a walnut. The skin on her hands like paper. David thinks she must be in her late eighties, even her nineties.

‘And what illness keeps you here *ingane yami?*’,

My child. From the distance of her age, he must still seem as a child to her.

‘The ill of not having a family, not having work.’

The old woman nods slowly, saying nothing, as if she knows well the tale of this illness.

He sleeps after the old woman’s bus has come and gone. Dreaming of a beautiful woman with wings, perching on roof tops of the tallest buildings in the town and laughing softly. It is Esperanza. But when she lands next to him, she crumbles and turns into the old woman with whom he shared his lunch, her wings tattered and sad, her face ancient.

It is dusk when he awakes. He decides to take a walk along the promenade.

The sun is just touching the horizon on the hills to the west as he walks. Sometimes the seaside brings flocks of people in the evening, coming to enjoy their escape from dusty offices and classrooms, other times it is oddly deserted. Tonight is one of those that are quiet.

Fishermen still stand patiently on the rocks, like pillars of salt. The odd old couple walk by him, but otherwise the beachfront is deserted. Despite it being still, warm, magnificent.

It would be a good evening for walking in company with someone companionable. We could talk about how flat and blue the sea is, how warm and windless the weather. How lovely it is to be alive right now. We could dream up a home to go back to after our walk, children to feed and love, chores to do before bed.

*We could hold hands, kiss as we looked at the sea.
Maybe it could be Esperanza.*

As if summoned by his thoughts, he spots Esperanza coming towards him on the boardwalk. He is anxious that he looks dreadful after last night and will certainly not live up to her standards. But it is too late to turn away, and he knows his heart would not have allowed him to in any case.

She is wearing a slightly faded red dress that sweeps around her legs as she walks. Her long braids are loose. She carries a large bag over one shoulder. She must be on her way home after a day of selling her beadwork.

‘David. What are you doing down on the boardwalk?’ she says as she gets close up to him.

‘It is a beautiful evening, I thought I would come for a stroll. Are you on your way home?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you sell many things today?’

‘Some bracelets and a necklace. I got a good price for the necklace.’

‘I am glad.’

She smiles at him, looks like she wants to carry on on her way. They are silent for a few breaths, watching each other.

She observes his kindly face, the peppery hair greying at the temples, his slightly slumped shoulders.

He remarks her slanty, almond eyes, lighter than usual with the sun shining into them.

‘I am sorry for what I said last night. I know that you do not feel the same, it was careless of me to make you feel uncomfortable,’ he blurts.

‘It is nothing; I was not offended.’ She looks past him.

‘I just did not want to make things difficult between us.’

‘Things will always be difficult between us,’ she responds, this time looking him directly in the eye.

‘They will?’ He is taken aback.

‘Yes, they will. You have given up, I have not. You love me, I do not know if I can love you in the circumstances. You are a good man, but that is not always enough.’

David does not know what to say. Esperanza is an outspoken woman, but she has never spoken about their relationship so frankly.

‘And it is not enough that I love you, and that your loving me could give me my life back?’

‘If you cannot find meaning without me, then you have nothing to offer me. I will be the one with the greatest value, and I do not care for such a circumstance.’

‘Are you talking of money?’

‘I am not. But it plays its part.’

He is quiet.

‘I will always be in your life, David, that part the fates seem to have worked out for us, but as for the rest, it cannot be.’

‘I understand.’

She smiles sadly, reaches out and squeezes his hand, laughs her throaty laugh.

‘I must go. Come sit with me at the stalls tomorrow, keep me company.’ She does not know why she says it, it is probably sending the wrong message, but she feels sad for him, such an intelligent man, sitting alone all day.

‘Alright, I will.’

‘See you tomorrow then. Good bye, David.’

‘Good bye, Esperanza.’

He watches her walk off towards the sun. She does not look back.

As she gets to the point where I am no longer be able to see her, I imagine her spreading great, grey wings and taking flight over the sea, into the night, into forever. Into the largeness where she belongs.

He turns away and slowly walks back to his cardboard bed, his view of the sea, the onset of night.

Seeking Wild Women

By Andrea Ward

Amelia squeezed her eyes shut. Then opened them widely. No difference. Still black. She lifted her hand and swished it slowly in front of her eyes. Nothing. Stretching her fingers wide apart, waking the muscles from their slumber, not even a silhouette.

The man beside her snorted and shifted position. Amelia took a deep breath in, pushed herself up to sitting, swung her legs off the bed and stood up. The caravan squeaked as she felt her way to and through the door to the space of the forest.

The hard, cool soil stretched out to welcome her feet, accompanied by an ear-assaulting symphony of shrieking cricketsbraaping frogs bats squeaking and chattering mingling rhythm with bass tones of hoo-whoo-whoo of owl. Damp earth scent danced up her nostrils.

Clouds parted for full moonlight to reveal silvery, sticky strands of ornate spider webshieldinga path sentried by gnarled milkwoods. Toe-heel to toe-heel, Amelia stepped as a bride down the aisle of a church, towards Arachnid's Gate. Lowering her body to the ground, she shinnied underneathto the feet of massive, noble yellowwood. As she stood, she brought her palms together at her chest and murmuredan incantation, surrendering herself to Nature's force of Wild.

Bat's wings swooshed the top of her head and Amelia crouched down low as it continuedits way home. She tilted her head backwards, her eyes seeing the forest roof shapes of empty spaces and beyond to scattered stars in congress with the ancient trees. Amelia inhaled deeply through her nostrils, the clean air replacing sticky city gunk. Her breathing synchronised with the rhythm of commentary of first bird of dawn conducting night orchestra to sleep and light creatures to rise, their excited chatter mixing into a chaotic happy song with the sky's movement to light haze.

A bony stinkwood beckoned Amelia in the direction of a pounding, distant waterfall. She tread her path towards the sound,

the soil cool and sharp beneath her feet, her bare legs brushed by graceful green feathers of tree-fern.

As she slowly picked her way between the stones, roots and leaves, forest peace permeated her blood, the fresh, moist air clothing her vulnerable skin. Then, a rustle, ghra-ghra-ghra.

In the near undergrowth.

Her blood froze to icicles; gut taut with daggers of glass shards; heart booming.

Amelia breathed in. “Fear,” she acknowledged. Then she whispered, “Surrender”. Her breath sighed out through her nostrils. The daggers of glass turned to dust, the icicles melted, the monster in the grass metamorphosing into a surprised creature slithering away to survive another day.

Drumming waterfall eased her bones and gently swayed her feet towards its pounding.

Amelia was greeted by a kaleidoscope of rainbows held in errant waterfall spray. A boulder seated her with front seats to the splash pool. She was mesmerised to hypnotic quiet while waterfall roared and colours gleamed.

A sliver of silver slid into forest’s rhythm. Circling gracefully in the pool, surrendering to the water’s flow then pushing against its force and diving under the waterfall’s pounding entrance. Then once again surrendering. At each cycle it rose higher to the surface, showing more of itself. At each circle, the size of creature grew.

Bigger.

And bigger.

And bigger still.

At each circle, Amelia’s hand clasped tighter to her mouth, her eyes opening wider, neck craning forwards.

FEAR

SURRENDER

The massive silver beast broke its circular play. Languidly it snaked and gracefully slid out the water to encircle a sunshine-warmed rock, spitting distance from a bouncing-hearted Amelia. The motionless, shimmering serpent merely looked at Amelia with black beady eyes.

It was like a beast come alive from a story book – an exaggerated, fantastical snake. Amelia wracked her memory for mystical

significances of snake, one of the few creatures which covered the spectrum from noble to wicked. In Ancient Greece, snake was healing. Neutral in shamanic teachings representing change, while with Adam and Eve, absolute evil.

And then it spoke.

Well, actually it didn't 'speak', but Amelia heard her. A drawling, gravelly but feminine voice like a jazz singer in a smoky bar. "Wonderful. Today I have a visitor. How appropriate that she should send one."

Words shaped by the water.

"Isn't this sun glorious? Perfect weather for new beginnings, for you and for me, Ntomb'am."

A Xhosa Snake Woman.

Uncoiling herself from the rock, Snake Woman slithered away.

Then rounded back.

Moving slowly, spasmodically, doing a weird sort of modern ritualistic break-dance; leaving a scaly, silvery, sheathy trail, she emerged, scalp adorned with closely plaited spirals, almond eyes in silky cocoa skin stretched over high cheekbones, bruised cherry, voluptuous lips bursting forth. Out squeezed ample breasts, well-covered hips and a set of strong legs.

"Ah-when!" she breathed out in a relieved sigh as she seated herself back atop her boulder and looked directly at Amelia. "Tsetse," she clicked, "that was hard work. While there is nothing like a good skin-shed, they are exhausting." This time the words were shaped by her lips.

Amelia closed her gaping mouth, shut her eyes, swallowed hard and then looked back at the rock.

Snake Lady was still there, now inspecting her shining new body in admiration. She looked back at Amelia. "So how are things with you Ntomb'am? What brings you to these parts?"

Eventually, Amelia managed to utter, "uhm, I..., I came to be part of Wild. Uh..., to be part of Greater. Uhm..., to surrender to it. To examine my fears..." Then she seemed to gather strength from the reminder to her purpose and relaxed, saying slowly and with squinting eyes, "although I must admit I didn't figure on this," she smiled and drew her hand across the stage of Snake Lady's domain. "I'm thinking that maybe Wild has a message for me."

“Ntomb’am, I am U-ma-mlambo,” said Snake Woman as she stretched her hand across her chest. “What is your name?”

“Pleased to meet you U-ma-mlambo. I’m Amelia.Uhm, does your name have a meaning? I mean, can it translate into English?”

“I am Mother of the River. A bit like a River Goddess but quite different. Just like a Goddess, I am powerful,” she paused for a beat and then continued slowly, her voice gaining gravity, becoming even deeper than before, “but my purpose is different. I am here to look after my people like a mother, rather than to be worshipped and appeased.” She stopped for a moment and took a deep breath before continuing, “Whew, the tasks of a mother are not easy - to give and to take away, to guide, to praise, to punish. And for what?” Umamlambo shook her head sorrowfully from side to side. “Usually we are rewarded with blame or our efforts are taken for granted. Ai, you know Amelia, I believe my purpose... Aych! I think I’m no longer needed. My children have been led astray by a powerful God, one more powerful than I. He is worshipped and adored. Ai, I do believe it is time for me to move on. Or at least I need a rest, or a diversion. Just go out and have some fun. Perhaps that will help me shed some light on this problem I have with my children.”

“Sjoe, yes, changing focus for a while is sure to help. That’s why I’m here. To get a different perspective. Get away from everyday stuff. You need to chuck in being a mother for a moment, I need to chuck in my lover. He moans incessantly that I don’t spend enough time with him. I can’t bear it when people become needy like that. It’s exhausting. Time for fresh beginnings indeed.”

“A needy lover!” chuckled Umamlambo with a twinkle in her eye. “Wonderful when it’s in the love department. Not so fine outside of that,” she sighed. “I have yet to find a man who can satisfy my love needs completely. Frustrating.” She looked out towards the waterfall, lost in thought then said, “but not as frustrating as my mother duties. I’m going to have to change my tactic. Try something else. But what?”

“I would be very interested to hear about it, Umamlambo,” said Amelia.

“Ai, Amelia, you know, Africa always has had its problems, like anywhere, and for thousands of years, they didn’t change much. Tribal conflict, drought, disease. Then the God of Capital came here.

So I was created by the Ancestors in an effort to teach our children that he wasn't the best choice of gods, to try and show them that, as you say, 'all that glitters is not gold'. He is a real threat to our traditions. My efforts have been in trying to teach our children that the cost of Capitalism is too high and that African traditions are worth keeping."

"That sounds about right to me, Umamlambo," nodded Amelia. "I agree that we place far too much value on money, which is a slippery friend indeed. So what did you do to try teach them?"

"My plan was to hijack Capitalism by using a muti called Ukuthwala. It's a charmed medicine which promises wealth, but the price is inflated."

"How much is it?"

"My helpers, the Sangomas, are free to set the rand value as they see fit. They need to live in the capitalist world after all. But the price is not only money. No Amelia, it is also blood."

"What do you mean?" asked Amelia, as thoughts of African vampires crossed her mind.

"Let me tell you the story of one of my children, Thabo. Wheh, ai! Glitzy Thabo. He loved the look of sharp suits and fancy cars. The kind of guy to wear expensive branded sunglasses on the top of his head. The 'everybody look at me because I've got money' look. But all he had was a dusty shop and a dented taxi. He was too lazy to keep his shop clean and not sharp enough to make sure his taxi-driver had a valid driving license. So people didn't buy from his shop very often and they avoided his taxi as much as possible. They preferred to buy from Lekhotla's shop a few streets away, which was sparkling clean and well stocked. And his shiny taxi was the latest model, driven by a qualified driver who didn't spend all his money on SABS bottled beer.

"Well, one day, Thabo asked Lekhotla how it was that he could afford to buy a new taxi. Lekhotla invited Thabo into his shop where he sat him down at a table in his office. He offered Lekhotla rooibos tea and they sat together to drink it. After asking after Thabo's family, including the children he frequently forgot to pay maintenance for, Lekhotla painted a picture of his life for Thabo. He started with his beautiful wife whom he had met at a river while looking after a herd of cattle in the school holidays. He had approached her gently

and humorously and won her heart over some time. Not for him the other tradition of capturing a woman against her will and dragging her off to install her as a wife in his kraal. He had worked every moment he could to invest in the cattle he needed, to pay lobola for her. Lekhotla pointed out with a chuckle how he had been smart to keep a cow for himself and that over the years since they were married, he had increased his head of cattle to a sizable herd.

“Now, he lived in a traditional but comfortable house with his wife and children. He had the added advantage of having fallen in love with a woman who made the best sorghum beer in the area. He had no need of shebeens with expensive, bottled beer and loud, brazen women. Lekhotla continued to focus his attention on his shop, ensuring that he sold what his customers wanted and bought in bulk so he could give them a good price. His view was that he was there to provide a service to his community, not as a businessman out to make a profit from his customers. This attitude resulted in an income which enabled him to buy a new taxi to replace the one he had before. He finished off by advising Thabo to stay away from shebeens - from the alcohol and the women.

“Thabo thanked Lekhotla, but then shook his head, murmuring that there had to be an easier way.

“That evening at the local shebeen, Thabo’s friend Khotso bought him a bottled Black Label and sat down next to him. Thabo hunted the women at the tables with his eyes while he listened to Khotso gossiping about a friend of his. When Khotso mentioned that this friend had become very rich recently, Thabo’s ears pricked up and his hunting eased off. The rumour was that this friend had gone to a powerful Sangoma who had given him ukuthwalamuti.

“After finding out where this Sangoma was, Thabo closed his shop for the day and journeyed the long, dusty, pot-holed road in his dented taxi to pay him a visit.

“The Sangoma listened to Thabo’s story. Then he offered to sell Thabo the muti for R5000. But there were terms and conditions - it would only work if no alcohol passed Thabo’s lips for a month and he would have to abstain from physical contact with women.”

At this point, Umamlambo shook her head and with a sad voice, said, “Thabo gave him the R5000.” She was quiet for some time and a tear rolled down her cheek. Then she continued, “Well, Thabo

managed to stay away from alcohol and women for the month. His shop did well and he bought a new taxi. I stepped in to fend off any bad luck. But how much money is enough? Thabo wanted more. And the more he wanted, the higher became the price. A price to which he agreed, so enraptured by this new God of Capital was he.

“Blood.

“Within two years, both his sons died. And our rich Thabo was dead after three years.”Umamlambo gave a deep sigh. “And it was me who got the blame. I’m seen as the vicious one, the evil one. Never appreciated for the tiresome work I have to do. Had Thabo followed the advice of Lekhotlato practise traditional values, he would be alive today and his family content and respected. But this is not understood. People need to take responsibility for their decisions.

“So, there you have it Ntomb’am. I need a break from all this so that I can change my method. It’s not working. I need to come up with another plan, another way to convince my children to hold on to their precious traditional values rather than follow that slippery God of Capital. My attempt at hijacking the Capitalist God has failed.”

Amelia walked over to Umamlambo. Crouching in front of her, she took Umamlambo’s hands in her own and held her gaze. “Yes, it is time for change for you. And for me, too. A change and a new beginning.” Amelia brought her hand to Umamlambo’s cheek. “Thank you Mother. I am grateful for meeting you. May your day abound with joy.”

“Go well Amelia,” spoke Umamlambo.

The sun came out from behind the clouds, shining onto the drops bounding, falling down the waterfall beside them. Amelia lightly stepped towards the forest path and her caravan, the sound of the roaring waterfall fading slowly behind her. She danced along, stopping to rub her cheeks against the bark of trees; to swing her legs over low lying branches to hang upside down, her blood coursing to her head; stopping to run her fingers over emerald green moss carpeting a rock.

The breeze, the sun, the birds knew how Amelia felt and she joined them in dance and song.

On reaching the outskirts of the forest, she felt giddy. Sitting in the sun, catching her breath and biting into an apple, Amelia thought about the unpleasant task ahead of her. Her stomach tightened as she looked over at the caravan where he was. Then she noticed it was ever so slightly rocking and creaking. Was he cleaning it? She had never seen him clean anything. It began to jolt with gusto. She walked to the door and opened it quietly to spy on him.

He was naked, his back towards her as he moaned. And there was Umamlambo, legs and arms coiled around his body. She looked up at Amelia, and winked.

The Vegetable Truth

by Ayo Oyeku

The truth is I relish my wife's vegetable soup. A fine blend of other culinary skills with the popular Nigerian delicacy makes it such a delight. The soup is always garnished with tasty food supplements. And a wholesome plate of nutrition and art piece is placed before me to enjoy. Dotted sweats appear on my forehead and arms whenever I am eating this soup. My wife often teased that I smack my lips like a foodie when eating it. But I can't deny I always bubble my cheeks in satiation to a piece of my wife, in the soup. She always wore an invisible badge for Best Chef, whenever she affirmed she never learned how to cook vegetable soup. It was her spell-riddled talent, and I never hid my admiration.

The other day, my mother came visiting us. This was barely six months after we got married. She had come with her own vegetable leaves, a black earthen pot, and other cooking condiments. She would prepare me *ẹfórírò*¹ – freshwater leaves that were nicely sizzled in tomato stew, garnished with stock fish, beef, cow offal and snails. This was what I grew up enjoying. Not until I ate my wife's variant.

As mother boiled the water leaves in the kitchen that day, I overheard her starting a cheap banter with my wife. I was still reading the daily news on my smartphone, when their conversation seemingly began to heat up the tomato sauce mother was cooking on the second burner. My wife had suggested another method for preparing the vegetable soup, which made mother frown. But it did not end there. Mother went on badgering my wife that it was her wrong recipe for preparing vegetable soup that had sealed her womb from cuddling a foetus.

Few minutes later, I heard my mother stir the boiled vegetable leaves in the tomato sauce. The sizzling sound of the delicacy did much to block me from hearing my wife sniffing to hold back the tears. The fine aroma of my mother's *ẹfórírò* with a tipping point of locust bean and fresh palm oil wafted through the windows, and mixed with my emotions for the moment. Mother's sweet vegetable

¹A popular vegetable soup among the Nigerian Yoruba tribe.

soup was soon served, but I declined to eat. I explained that my wife's recipe for cooking vegetable soup was preferable.

I was calm when I said this. But mother began to scream on the top of her lungs. She said I was under my wife's spell. She had barely settled down in Lagos for five hours, and decided to leave because my truth stung her like a hot aluminum pot. She said I would regain my senses when my wife's spell over me was broken. She packed her things and left.

Two days after, I visited my mother in the village. She smiled as I told her how much I enjoyed her *ẹfórírò* with a soft morsel of *ẹbà*². The old woman did not know I had come under my wife's intense persuasion to resolve our differences.

This is how my wife usually starts cooking it. She takes a magical journey into the southern climes of the country and returns with a rare recipe famed for rejuvenating the body during convalescence. I smile and poke my eyes as she skillfully cuts the washed pumpkins and water leaves into smaller bits. She believed blenders were used by the dotcom era women – as she belonged to the *old school*. The precision with which she squeezes the cow tripe, cow liver, beef, and dry fish together like a morsel of bread, and cut them through her thumb and first finger, adds a particular flavour to the vegetable soup that was in process. And while water is being drained out of the leaves – she begins to boil the beef and cow offal.

Like any other day, I would stroll in and out of the kitchen to offer her kind words to hasten the cook. And that day wasn't different either. She had just chased me out of the kitchen like an errant child for trespassing, when the doorbell rang. I opened the door, collected an inflated, tawny envelope from the courier, and shut the door. The mail was for me, but the sender's address was not familiar.

My wife was adding the required amount of fresh palm oil, crayfish, and pepper to the cooked beef, when I walked into the kitchen to inform her who came by. She covered the pot, continued

² A popular doughy meal prepared from cassava grains.

to boil, and told me to return to the living room to check my mail. I sank into the sofa, opened the mail, and watched a lewd myriad of revelations spread before my eyes.

I could not tell when my wife with cooking fingers added periwinkle and water leaves to the cook. But I was familiar with the routine: She would subsequently add pumpkin and salt to it, after another five minutes or less. The trick was simple but noteworthy – she doesn't overcook the water leaves. She adds salt to taste. And ensures palm oil is the only liquid for the vegetable soup. She then turns off the heat, stirs the contents in the pot together, and allows it to simmer.

I felt choked. My thick body frame seemed to pulp and melt into the sofa. Disconcerting thoughts fled through my mind. Our marriage was just a little over a year. I lingered over what to do. The aroma of the soup had blanketed the living room by then, but my lips were dry. My wife soon appeared in the living room with a plate of her special vegetable soup –*edikangikong*³–served with a white morsel of semolina⁴. I stared at the addictive vegetable soup and regained my senses. I began to eat.

She had noticed the queer look on my face. But since I was now eating, she believed the matter was off the nape of my hairline. She was sure it had something to do with the mail. And she could have thought it was something relating to work – like it usually was – or a disturbing request from long throated relatives. But her fingers trembled when she picked the mail and opened it.

I continued to eat, and watched her with the corner of my bloodshot eyes. She watched as pieces of her unclad self were shredded and displayed in photographic renditions. I champed some stubborn cow tripe with my molars, and loved the noise it made in my ears. She fell on her knees when she saw the accompanying letter tell a true tale of her wanton lifestyle as a spinster with an old lover – when she claimed to be my doting girlfriend. I could tell she wished her life ended that very minute.

I continued to sandwich the soup and some of the supplements within a handful of semolina, before letting them into my mouth. By

³ This vegetable soup is native to the Efiks, people from AkwaIbom and Cross River states of Nigeria.

⁴ A doughy meal made from flour.

then, my wife had managed to grip my foot in submission. She begged with unclear words. She cursed herself and whimpered like a child. I acted like my limbs had lost life. Her broken voice made her inaudible. My disturbed mind made the meal tasteless.

“Thank you for the meal. You can take the plates away.”

I wasn't sure if her heart ceased when she heard me speak. But she stiffened for a moment. She let go of my leg. And let her teeth and lips suffocate the fresh cries. She looked at my eyes, and I looked at hers. She wanted me to speak again, but I said nothing more. She crawled to her feet, and I quaked within, as she pulled the plates away, avoiding my gaze.

“Did you also make this special kind of vegetable soup for him too?”

I asked as she returned from the kitchen. She replied in the negative. She wanted to say more, but I motioned my first finger upward, and she became mute. I got up, and she staggered backwards. I made for the kitchen, got a fresh plate, and dished two spoonful of edikangikong. A second helping was enough to calm my mind.

My wife sometimes teased it was high time I learned how to cook my favourite soup. But I always shook my head, like bugs were feasting on it. She often added that four years in marriage, plus seven years in relationship was more than enough coaching time for me. At that point I would throw my glance away or change the topic. But it was true I already knew how to cook my favourite soup. But I doubted it would taste like hers.

A few weeks ago, I wanted to tell my wife I had learned something new. Something new about the recent way she beamed with happiness. Something about her new set of lingerie. Something about how she hid her phones away from sight. Something like a puddle of darkness clustered around her pupil. Instead, I told her she should try cooking my favourite soup with frozen spinach. This was a new recipe I read could perform similar wonders. She said nothing.

I watched her leave the house some minutes ago. She said she was going to the store to get the frozen spinach. But her recent

WhatsApp conversation claimed otherwise – she was going to meet a friend at a hotel. Our little son – another master chef in the making – was playfully removing ugu⁵ leaves from their stem. I said nothing.

Had my wife been pretending all these years? Maybe she didn't have cooking fingers like she claimed. Maybe she wanted her friend to teach her how to make vegetable soup with frozen spinach. Maybe it was the hotel chef that would teach her. And maybe she never liked cooking vegetable soup, and only did it in order to save our marriage.

I looked into the bright, transparent eyes of our son. He smiled at me, and I smiled back. He reminded me he was a product of a relationship that had weathered much storms like vegetable roots on a soft bed. The little man ran into my awaiting arms. I collected the ugu leaves from him, and began to pluck them myself. I stroked our son's ear occasionally, as I agreed it was high time I started cooking vegetable soup by myself.

⁵A popular vegetable leaf in West Africa, better known as Fluted Pumpkin.

The Poachers Son

By Yugo Gabriel Egboluche

Me? Kobe the son of Binga - Queensland's legendary poacher, tied hands and feet? Utterly outrageous! Anyway, I am here now. At least you will seek me no further. You three think my father, whom you banned from the trade can't do much? Is that right? Charlatans! Wait till he hears about this!

I am sat here in your grasp as if I know what this is all about. It baffles me how nosy you all had become. I bet it is idleness and lack of work. When did watching the stars become a crime in this part of the world? Or am I not allowed to drink liquor while lying in the arms of the one I love? Be it in public or in the shelter of the fields? Or should we say in the wild? Don't you have parents and grand parents? Didn't they tell you how they preferred the outdoors so much, so they would make love in the fields? Didn't they revel in telling you the fable? Of the air that stroked their skin and the cheering lullabies from the birds.

Aha! Now I know. You didn't have that luxury. When you were busy chasing fireflies and maiming termites rather than listen to the voices of reason by moonlight.

"Shut your mouth!" It was him again. The restive khaki clothed brigand shouting in full weight of his voice interrupting me.

I won't brigadier. I won't! What have I done to be bound hands and feet? I will contest my case anytime and anywhere. In fact, take me to the Mayor. You have denied me so much comfort. No ventilation. No air-conditioners. I prefer the confines of tenement walls and ceilings made from asbestos rather than hear the sounds of creaking beech floors and broad sheets of stringy-bark splitting above me. I really will prefer lock and keys rather than see cracks and spaces from which I could escape but cant. My conscience is clear, so I fear not. I was being human, relishing creation in nature's largesse. That custom handed down by my fathers. No wonder we are blessed in built and wit. You see Mother Nature knows her own.

I see why you lack. Clothed and tucked in khakis to hide the spectre of your skeletons. I notice. I see why you talk less. So your

veins don't leap out of your necks. Well I can understand. You all are saving your energy till morn when the Mayor shall beckon. Muppets!

Look at me. Here! Here! Look thither. Then, envision my father dressed in khaki? No way! We were born bare-chested and so we were bred. Mother Nature likes her art, sometimes in its full glare. Don't say I didn't tell you. She would even bless you more. Ever wondered why we rise at cock-crow? So the morning sun can re-energize us for the day's hunt. Well you wouldn't need that because the Mayor's left-overs might do just the same. Perhaps!

"No wonder you went for the Mayor's daughter. So you could feed fat on the grub she brings." It was that sun bathed, almost flat-chest lady, this time gawking from her desk.

Hey Ebony! Where is thy husband? In far away Kooma I bet. Is it the grub the Mayor spared that let him allow you prey in the sight of your comrades? I presume. You see, Tilda might be the Mayor's daughter in your perspective, but for me she is but any other lady. Holding fast not just for the hunt I bring but also for the heat I bear. In wadding the forests for a kill, I learnt the art of manoeuvring to ease the heat and sweat. In fact, I got a lot of it to spare. So I need not trade like you - trading your husband's warmth for the cold and perils of Mamu forest.

Shush! Let the men talk! Not as if they are any better. Infidels!

Come to think of it, wasn't it both of us you caught in the act? Why would I be the one to suffer her lot while your comrades escort her home? I know it has never been a fair world, but at least I believed there was still sanity in the wild. Birds protect their young, cats group for a kill and bulls stride in herds. Where then is she I call mine?

"Oh, so you don't really love her. Do you?" Not again woman! "If you did, you would have swallowed whatever pain it was for love's sake."

Woman! I'll give you the privilege of correcting a wrong impression. The question shouldn't be about me loving her, but about her sharing my pain and to be where I am. Why didn't she opt to join me? Why hasn't her father - the Mayor; dripping spittle and hauling a rotund belly not been notified to come rescue me? If she be the Mayor's daughter, I too am a Hunter's son. In fact a Poacher's son - damn the odds.

"Kobe, my son..."

Don't call me son; I am not your son. You think your calm and age could deliver me to you? No, I have got your age in my father's dad. Go see his field, his barn. I know you know nothing about reaping the fruits of your labour. At your age, you should be swinging gently on a rocking chair under the chill skies of Mamu while your sons bring in the catch and your daughter's clatter in glee. Not sharing stools with that edgy brigand without a rank who calls himself a brigadier and a supple-sapped ebony. Don't you love life?

"Take, my son; wipe the blood from your lips."

Is anything wrong with all of you? Kobe is Binga's son, and Binga is the son of Sonya. My lineage can't afford idling away when they are traps to set.

"You weren't caught setting traps either."

Shut up brigand! Show some respect. You don't interrupt your superiors or interfere in matters way out of your league. For your information, I was simply on recess. I couldn't have just wandered around till the traps snapped. No way, I make use of time. And it was right for me to fuel my masculinity in that cosy sunset. You think I don't know what you have been pacing up and down for? A precursor to what you do under the covers of the baobab. Laying in wait for the maidens to finish quick the evening meal, lie to be allowed to go fetch firewood only to end up in your cage. I tell you, the baobab has eyes; and ears and nose. It sees, hears and breaths. Poor thing that beholds your obscenity, endures your whimper and stands your sweat filled whiff. Gullible they be; the maidens who fall for your petty lie. Have you ever seen the queen? Talk more of dinning with her deputies? Not even the Mayor would allow you such opulence with her daughter. Liar!

"Ha-ha-ha"

Laugh all you want, Ebony, laugh. It's my kind of concession.

"How dare you make jest of me?"

Hit me brigand! Beat me! You have the courtesy of wielding the baton but not the courage to break me. I am a thorough breed who just realised he had been stooping so low in making proficient an address for you. You, who has never spoken to the Mayor's daughter or dared wink at her; Riffraff! Kobe can't be bothered. He has been there, seen it all and conquered. In fact; I'm still on it. She is that catch in winter's morn - way above your league. You know what, I'm

done with you. What were you saying, old general? Now you know what your 'brigadier' does in the shades.

Well then, if you have nothing to say, stop looking at me that strange. The forest is my playground and the fields have ears. Hang on! I know that look. You are wondering if your daughter is among his legion. Oh dear, old Sonya wouldn't do that. He has his wife to query while he settles at making his kids fat. You see that's why he still has hairs on his head. Share the thought and workload, so you could live longer and healthier. So I learnt from Sonya.

Well you see I'm not into snitching. I mind my own business – Binga taught me that. If it wasn't so, I might have known if your daughter was among his lot. Worse still, if it was so, I would have been cast down to that brigand's league. Do you think I would have been able to clutch the logger's niece? The missionary's long travelling female visitor? Or most recently, the Mayor's daughter? No, the snitches would have told me to set my traps according to my skill and stick to my league. The league made up of sons and daughters of hunters and craftsmen; like Malewa, Poweri, Bison and the like. Look him in the eye; General, look at him; your brigadier, fidgeting at the mention of those names. He knows them all now. They make for a huge chunk of his horde.

See General! To date, this lot bring me food and water even if it is done so they could catch a glimpse of my cohort. It was hard to mind my own business especially while playing around the fields; but the words of my father's, I don't toy with. It all started when that logger's niece, Prisca, caught my attention. Ha-ha, look how I smile at the mention of her name - the pains from your torture amounting to null. Prisca my Prisca; she taught me a lot. She turned out to be the first to say a word to me, for I minded my own business. Not knowing anyone would care to intrude. I was so naïve but spared no frailty. It was her that made me aware of what heat I conveyed. Bold enough to tell it to Sonya's face. That day, I was re-born.

"Go on Kobe, what was it she told your grandfather?"

Cough! Cough!

Hmm general, like I was saying before the ladybirds buzz, I don't trade leagues. You have to find out for yourself. I really don't care who this brigand frolics with in the dark nor do I care about their surnames.

As for you ebony, that is the end of my lecture. Get me something to eat as well. You can't serve them and ignore me. I am no outcast. I am a son of the soil – your brother.

"Finally amity returns. I see someone lost a lot of heat and strength? No way! Not till you answer me."

I take that as an insult, woman! No grandson of Sonya begs. I lie in wait all night for.

Bear without food, how much more now. The thought of the harvest alone was a sweet smelling aroma to my nostril and with the harvest comes my full. What do you know about heat? What do you know about strength? Does your husband ever long for you when you are out all night? Does he show it when he reaches out to embrace you when you return? Or does he salute your return with a mere nod?

You see, it's written all over your face; that shrivel of weakness. He could care less. So shush; the herds are fleeing. Get me food!!!

"Did you hear that, Uzar? Did you hear him?"

Don't loose the strength you don't posses Ebony? The brigand has nothing more to say; besides I think he might have serious issues to resolve with your General after dawn. So you know; it might have been your beauty alone that attracted you to the warrior of Kooma clan – your husband. I'll tell you a secret, ladybird. If you don't have the strength, give him the tickle, he would somehow find his heat and show you the care you deserve. You are worth more than his cheerleader. For Mamu's sake, he is a warrior! Now don't confuse it; I am not patronizing you so I could share in the pudding, no way! After all, your sons and daughters have in one way or the other benefited from my kin. If not from our excess hunt, it would be from the proceeds of the Whiteman's exchange. There is no way our gestures couldn't have reached you. Yet you accuse us of poaching even to the extent of trying to deny me food.

"Enough!"

Good! General that is exactly the same thing Sonya would have done, perhaps more...

"Clean him up, – Uzar. And Leila, fetch him something to eat."

Right! But no way! There is no chance I would allow that brigand touch me. Not after this battering. I'll do it myself if you think Leila isn't strong enough to dab my swell.

“As you will, son. Just know you are still tied up in custody.”

Well untie me then! Don't make it look as if I have had too much to drink. It has never been heard that the heirs of Sonya posses a light brain.

“I haven't said so either. Boy! You have done all the talking!”

Boy? Me? Passed for a boy? Damn it. Just call me Kobe. I am no son of yours and can never be your boy not in this life or thereafter. You have a handful already, bunch of mediocre lieutenants. Wait, you are not walking out on me, are you? I am not done yet.

“It's late erm...; I just need to get some air.”

Oh good. But on a second thought, isn't it too late for you to think about your life's wrong?

“...Definitely! Same way it is late for me to patronise you. Eat your food; we will hear the Mayor's verdict at dawn.”

What a day!

“General! General! Wake up, the Mayor is here. I saw him striding down with his deputies and his daughter.”

Isn't that quick, Uzar, or what is it they call you? I barely heard the rooster. Didn't know his protruding stomach would let him pace. At least this would allow me catch a morning glimpse of Tilda – my dearest. Binga said it's vital to see your lover first thing at dawn. It helps your decision.

“Where is the culprit, General Quesa?”

“Right here, Mayor. Sir, he is that fugitive poacher boy. We caught him this time making love in the fields with...erm...ermm - with one of the maidens.”

“Making love? Hang on Mr! Are you not Binga's son?”

I am, most assuredly.

“Oh, well, didn't we all do that? I see you have not caught him red-handed poaching, have you?”

“No General. Sir!”

“Release him! ...and you, don't do that in the open again. Not with any of my subjects.”

Didn't you all hear him? Untie me! And don't mope amiss. You have my word Mayor and I'll send Binga your regards.

“Please do!”

The Coward

by Louis E. Bourgeois

And he just smoked my eyelids and punched my cigarette...

--Bob Dylan

Outside the window was a procession of Mardi Gras going on: huge papier maché faces from Anne Boleyn to Nixon, screaming topless women with tattooed breasts, a boa constrictor wrapped around a hippie's neck, adultery in a second room flat, hand-clapping, a lot of green stuff, heavy jars of whiskey, a dozen real Indians...

Inside the house, Lucas and Kramer were not looking out the window. Lucas turned down the television and said, "Throw all the cats back in the boat." He made himself comfortable in the worn plaid chair and stared tight-faced at the television, as if he were trying to ward off some unaccountable fix on his mouth. On the television, the two of them were watching what was going on out in the street. Kramer had an awful grin on his face because Jim Beam wouldn't stop burning at his stomach. This was due to the fact that, during Fat Tuesday, Kramer made no apologies for taking big sucking gulps. Kramer sprawled out on the bird brown ripped up sofa and said, "How is the value of cat quantified anyway? Is a cat intrinsically worse off than a dog? Or does it have something to do with how a cat perceives life, thus making cats so detestable?"

Lucas, in a low voice said, "Cats are God's children."

There wasn't anything left between Lucas and Kramer. This was due to the fact that Lucas still worked at the banana loading dock and continued his weekly consumption of acid every Friday night. Kramer didn't do that anymore, as if he just found out it was illegal. And not only did Kramer go off and get a college degree, but he was to be married in a week, and in a month's time, he and his wife were to settle down in the subdivisions of Metairie. Kramer's visits to

Lucas had dwindled over the years until they became something of a duty, done only for some distant respect for childhood.

Lucas, becoming rather nervous, said, “A cat is worth, at a minimum, ten dogs easily. I know you don’t like cats anymore, but that’s because you don’t look at things like you used to. Dogs don’t mind if you throw them overboard. They’ll keep coming on back with a full grin, licking you all over while they’re shivering from the wet. If you do that just once, perhaps twice, to a cat, he’ll hate you for life. Cats are moral. Dogs are too stupid for that, always forgetting, forgiving, neglecting. They’re always wet, too, a cat only gets wet once or twice.”

Kramer, liking Lucas less and less, said, “Well, my dear old friend, maybe cats need to change their ways. More people like dogs because dogs are obedient. They savor love not morality. Cats need to loosen up.”

Lucas often thought of hurting Kramer with a lead pipe. He had one too, he called it Itchy. But during Kramer’s few visits nowadays, Lucas was overpowered by Kramer’s presence. Kramer had gained so much more than Lucas in life that Kramer had a tyrant’s rule over him. For instance, even though Kramer had told Lucas about the wedding, he had not mentioned if Lucas was invited. Lucas felt sick, sick, sick when Kramer said he was getting married, for Lucas was foolish enough to believe that a boyhood promise could be kept.

Kramer, with his insides burning, looked out the window and compared the parade outside to how it looked on the television screen. The camera held all the important context of Mardi Gras in the right perspective. It seemed to leave out anything mundane, superfluous, or disgusting. There was one important thing that Kramer had learned that he thought served him well, which was that you can never beat all the negative elements in life. Therefore, it was best to ignore what you could and hope that much of it wouldn’t come your way.

Kramer said, “I agree that dogs can be a little stupid at times. I mean, they can be a little silly, but I still prefer them to cats. Cats are just too goddamned mean and selfish. They get lost in themselves without thinking about anybody’s feelings.”

Lucas said, “Oofish, Oofish, Oofish”, a few times and then he said, “Maybe they don’t want their own feelings hurt, so they just keep to themselves, because they’re smart, they know how cruel everyone else can be. You know, Oofish, Oofish, Oofish, Oofish.”

Kramer, thinking of his fiancée, smiled and chuckled like he was the most satisfied accountant in New Orleans. He said, “You know, this is the first time I’ve ever thought of cats as cowardly. Cats aren’t noble or smart, they’re cowards. Dogs are brave and honorable.”

Lucas, grabbing at his eye, and dealing with a twinging lip, said, “Dogs are much bigger than the largest of cats.”

Kramer laughed and laughed and kept thinking about how good it was going to feel when he got home to his soon-to-be wife.

Lucas kept messing with his eye and sweated a lot.

Outside the window, creatures of various types crawled under a street light.

About a hundred yards from the house, and barely out of the frame of the television, six New Orleans policemen were hand-cuffing several rowdy, immoral, calamitous people from St. Bernard Parish. The trouble-makers were exposing themselves and shouting *Maurice! Maurice!* For no apparent reason! The police had no objections to either act. What did the St. Bernardians was when one of them begot a contemptuous finger gesture intended for an extremely oversized horse-riding New Orleans police officer. Before the hand-cuffing was finished, several St. Bernardians had broken ribs and black eyes. A couple of them had very bad headaches.

Not long after that, a bare-footed and shirtless ten-year-old boy from Kenner had his foot crushed by a tractor pulling a float. The name of the float was What God Has Wrought, which featured twenty of the blondest blondes in the country. They, the blondes, were known as the White Goddesses. Each blonde had in her possession some form of technology never before seen until the White Goddesses gave their performance.

Nobody knew how this float got into the Krew of Eros, but it was by far the most popular. The closest runner-up was a float called Paraguay. It was an alternative that everyone forgot about when What God Has Wrought made its way following.

The ten-year-old boy from Kenner acquired a permanent limp.

When Lucas and Kramer were growing up in the suburbs of Kenner they swore to be different from their parents. They were to be real individuals. Lucas and Kramer were from divorced families and out of defiance, promised, with blood from a needle, that they would never get married so as to stop the ugly flux of untruth. Kids from broken homes are often mad. When they were in high school, they still maintained this outlook on life and only went out with girls for ornamentation and primordial needs. They read only Existentialist literature and in their senior year started an underground press, but they were chided by their peers and got in trouble with the school and the cops.

Nothing had worked out. They were taught that it wasn't in their nature to change their environment. They were beaten down and told that somewhere in their education they had misinterpreted the signs of what a decent human being is according to the curriculum.

It wasn't quite midnight on Fat Tuesday. At about twenty minutes till, the crowds outside were getting displeased. People were becoming careless and rude. A fat woman with a neon head bow was so drunk that she slipped on a small rubber ball and broke her leg. She was stepped on many, many times. Behind a dumpster a deranged man who had clear objectives, went beneath, between, and

behind an unwilling and very conscious woman. Right before she got into this mess, she was looking for a corridor to the hotel. She missed it by what might have been miles. And Lucas had swallowed his last two hits of double-dipped coseismal acid. He sweated and sweated and sweated.

Kramer was indolently drunk; he turned from the television and caught site of Lucas having a hard time with the acid. Lucas had been eating acid all day long. He made little birdie noises, and thought his hands were God's implements of creativity; then he started slapping himself.

Kramer said, "Another thing about cats, they can't be trained to do anything. That's why people hate them. They can't be taught to have any fun. They're so connected to their natural predisposition that it's sickening. Cats are the loneliest of all things, next to the South American sloth. I hate cats."

At midnight the crowds outside the window did not want Mardi Gras to be over and about twenty people decided they were not leaving the street, despite the police.

They were quite serious about it.

A black man from Algiers lost all his front teeth when he kicked the shin of a policeman's brown stallion—a nice magnificent three-year old. When the black man got off the ground, he was a rabid, toothless, black man from Algiers (whose ancestry included cowboys from California) with a long-handled knife with a thick blade. When the knife went in between the stallion's broad shoulders, a bovine, blonde-headed, New Orleans policeman from Bunkie, Louisiana (whose ancestry consisted of stump grinders and root diggers) knocked the man from Algiers out of consciousness forever and forever with his gun metal blue club.

During this event, Lucas watched from the window and cried, "Get all the cats back in the boat. Dogs will kill you." Lucas then

sulked in the corner, trying really hard to thwart a bad acid trip, murmuring *Oofish*.

Kramer, reclining passively, and comfortably drunk out of his mind, watched all of this live on the television. The black man, in a body bag, was eventually carried off; passing right in front of the window that Kramer had his back turned to.

The Praegustator Who Spied on the World

By Samuel Kolawole

I ate them before they ate me.

—Field Marshal Dr Idi Amin Dada VC, DSO, MC

To say Bowter Bweter ate to earn a living would be inaccurate because the only other option was being fed to the crocodiles at the falls. What penalty could be greater than being thrown to those saw-toothed reptiles? Only the Conqueror of the British Empire had the answer to that question. He was the Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea.

For Bowter, spying on the world around him in Kampala was his own way of breaking free from the limited options life offered him. He worked part of the morning three times a week and in the evenings for the rest of the week. He dressed hurriedly as if wearing clothes were a burden and hardly groomed his body. Hair sprouted out of his ears like wild grass through a cracked wall. His body stank to high heaven.

He woke up late but never missed the covered pick-up truck because he made few preparations for work. He would walk for about ten minutes from his little apartment embedded in the heart of his neighborhood and wait for the truck from the Bureau of State Research to arrive. He had no control over what happened in his workplace. He was told what to do. Outside work, there wasn't much else to do. He had no one to talk to. He wasn't really much of a talker anyway. People took little notice of him, but that didn't bother him.

After work, he would sit in his chair with flaking leather upholstery wearing only shorts and drink from a bottle of waragi held between his thick calves while looking out his window. Bowter loved watching people who could not see him. It was something he could control. That was in fact what propelled his life forward. It was what distracted him from all the wasted days of his past and all those yet to come. He watched people go through the motions of life and work.

He would stare like an owl, his eyes roving, trying to figure out whether something was going on beneath the things he saw. He

would shun the sounds in his room: the crackling of the aluminium sheets in the heat of the sun, the hum of a small refrigerator, rats creeping along the floor or cockroaches leaping from wall to wall.

He watched the daily exodus of worn heels from Chowdhury and Sons, the Indian-owned shoe factory far off, and the thick fog of red sand as company trucks chugged by. He watched people stream in and out of bars and cafes. He watched mongrels trot on side streets, mate in little corners. He watched them long enough to notice when they spawned scrawny little puppies. He watched women with Afros and garish makeup make trips to the seedy drugstore down the road. He watched people gather around the newspaper kiosk like tiny insects milling around something sugary, debating with much heat. He watched random pedestrians stop to join in the argument before ambling on.

He knew when the thick-lipped butcher arrived with fresh meat and an army of green flies. He knew when the bell-jingling evangelist with his spectral white robe and wild, unshorn hair began his sermon of a new heaven and new Earth. He knew the light-fingered boys and where they lived. He knew that the dreadlocked man who sold arts and crafts fooled around with the road sweeper.

He pondered on the things he saw. He imagined alternate scenarios, he questioned, he inferred. He kept his ideas and opinions to himself. In the end, it was just about watching, pondering, and questioning; nothing more.

The short drive to the Den gave the praegustātōrēs just a little time to take stock of their lives, pray to their gods, and worry about what would happen when the vehicle finally stopped. Arrival was signalled by the raw, grinding noise the brakes gave off when the pickup went up the hill in the quiet neighborhood where the Den was located.

They usually stopped in front of the gated compound with high barbed-wire fences and waited outside until a squadron of guards with their dogs emerged like hyenas slithering forth from their lairs. Commander J, the leader of the squadron, was a tall man with a walrus moustache and a regal paunch that spilled over a belt strapped with pistols on both sides.

His pants always looked like they were about to drop. He would stare at the praegustātōrēs with his piercing black eyes, then give a

little dry whistle and snap his fingers. Almost at once, the dogs would snap out of their leashes and scamper around them to sniff their crotches. After they had been thoroughly checked, they would be led to the innards of the Den and ordered to sit in the dining hall studded with wooden tables of various shapes and sizes. Then the meals would be served from small cooking pots under the watchful eyes of the squadron. The cooks from State House Catering Department served different dishes, so no praegustātor ate from the same pot.

Having grown up experiencing life's hardships, smuggling coffee across the Nile for meals and a roof over his head, Bowter had imagined his end would be a swift one—a dagger to his neck or a bullet in the forehead. For him, the worst thing about dying was having time to be scared of death, going through the interval between the certainty of death and death itself. It was like crossing that threshold between life and death in slow motion. But then he realized that with his job he would die a slow death, a sure death.

The Conqueror of the British Empire would always squat over his toilet bowl instead of sitting on it because Koboko, where people shat into dug-out earth, never left him. He would always plunge himself into the schoolgirls his black-booted guards picked from the streets on their way to school, and every cell in his body would dry up, sapped of vitality, ready to be reinvigorated. He would host diplomats in his villa to feasts crammed with silverware brimming with gastronomic pleasures while the Revolutionary Suicide Jazz Band serenaded, and he wouldn't want his guests to be poisoned by traitors and enemies of the state.

He would summon the chefs at odd hours just to satisfy his inexplicable desire to engorge himself. Bowter could survive many days, maybe weeks, but the Conqueror of the British Empire would go hungry again. He would host lavish parties. His enemies would keep piling up.

So each time Bowter scooped spoonfuls of pilau—rice cooked with spices into his mouth, ate malakwon prepared with mashed groundnuts, or bit into a piece of roast chicken, steam filling his mouth, his lips shimmering with oil, he was reminded of his duty, his place in this world, his fate. The fear that one day something would be set down in front of him that would claim his life clung to him.

The fear of facing that certainty was like a blow to the pit of his stomach and a lump pressing down on his chest.

Before death crept into Kay's pot, the praegustātōrēshad hoped that the rumours were unfounded and their jobs merely ceremonial because the whole setup seemed ludicrous.

Kay was a husky man with a large fleshy face whose thinly bristled jaw knotted and slackened like a cow's whenever he chewed. Bowter knew that he had a daughter, even though the praegustātōrēs didn't say a thing to one another, because they had taken a vow of silence. The only thing they shared in common was that they carried out the tasks together. The pickup was mostly quiet, each person thinking his own thoughts, but Bowter observed him. Bowter knew that the Field Marshal's men had Kay's daughter because his lips quivered in prayers every time they drove to the Den and he kept a grainy picture of her in his breast pocket. He brought it out once in a while to look at it, his eyes moist with tears.

The trifling chatter from the guards ended in midsentence. The sounds of cutlery and utensils stilled. A fellow across from him pointed to Kay's bleeding nose. Kay dropped his spoon and quickly dabbed his nose with his napkin. The cloth became smeared with his blood.

In that first startled terror, he flung the napkin away and shoved his plate of rice aside so that it sailed off the table and crashed on the floor.

His look softened, he swallowed saliva, his Adam's apple bobbing to mark the internal passage of the liquid. A wave of panic swept across the room. The guards cocked their guns; chairs dragged and groaned as the praegustātōrēs deserted their tables while inspecting their own bodies for any manifestations. In no time, Kay was left alone at the table. Tears fell thickly from his eyes. He coughed out his daughter's name. More blood seeped from his nose. When he saw his imminent dispatch from this life, he reared up toward the Commander and grabbed his collar before anyone could make any move.

"Take care of my girl. Please take care of her; I did what I was told. I did it." In a choked voice he cried out to him, lips quivering and frothy with blood. The squadron tore him away from their blood-stained Commander and held him still on one of the chairs,

whereupon a sudden, horrendous pain lashed him. By this time the poison had dried up his guts as evidenced by the black-flecked phlegm he now coughed up. No one could help him. Soon, he was biting through his tongue and choking on his blood. In the end, his eyes silted and his teeth were bared like those of a dying dog, his chest juddering with each shallow breath.

His body was placed in a blanket, wrapped snugly, and buried in a shallow, roughly hewn grave in the backyard. The guards herded everyone together. Commander J paced back and forth, barking orders. He made calls and fired cables. No one else spoke a word. It was not a time for words. It was not a time for thoughts either.

The day seemed to stretch on endlessly. Night fell. Bowter went in for questioning. In the patch of rheumy light, Commander J barked at him and spat in his face. He fired off questions and scribbled at full speed in a notepad produced from his pocket, frowning and looking him in the eye once in a while.

Bowter answered all the questions he was asked without qualms. He did not know what to make of what happened. He had no inner musings. No pondering or ideas. Just a numbing silence.

The pickup truck dropped him off, and he shoved his way through the crowd of people going back and forth in the final rush of the day. He got to his apartment and climbed the stairs with exhausted legs. He slapped his door closed and stretched out on his flea-ridden mattress.

Bowter stared at the splotched ceiling, wishing that something would happen to pitch him into the arms of another reality.

Bowter flinched against the shaft of raw sunlight spilling in through the curtains of his loneliness. He looked out on the streets, his eyes roaming, hoping to chance upon anything interesting. He saw faces that he recognized or half-recognized from the street—the familiar faces of strangers from the daily commute. He turned his eyes toward the arts and craft shop; he assessed the blue and gray French suits mounted on wooden mannequins in front of a shop managed by an old lady. He wondered whether he would ever wear one of those and how it would look on him, but dismissed the thought almost immediately, stifling a sigh. The simple pleasures of life were just not for him.

It had been eight months since Kay ate off the plate that killed him. The Field Marshal had purged the army ranks; helicopters flew overhead, and the radio crackled with a voice announcing a curfew as boots marched into neighbourhoods and ordered people to hop like a frog in the streets. The prison population in Nakasero swelled. People vanished, and their corpses showed up floating in the Nile like poisoned fish. Suspected enemies faced firing squads in front of TV cameras. Some of the chefs at the State House Catering Department were never found. Rumors had it that they were fed to the crocodiles. The Field Marshal beefed up the number of the presidential guards.

For several weeks, men of the Bureau of State Research kept an eye on Bowter. They lurked on street corners and shadowed him in crowded places. He knew he was being watched, but he did not mind. Only an expert at watching people would know that. He knew the storm would pass.

Things became calm again after a while, the BSR men stopped showing up, and Bowter went back to spying on the world to distract himself from his troubles.

Feeling slightly dizzy, he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he caught sight of a figure across the street fingering the beads Dreadlock Hair sold. A faded shawl covering her hair and knotted under the chin gave her face a heart shape. Her dress was fresh and flowery. Bowter was taken aback by her appearance because she struck him as odd. She was brown skinned so Bowter reckoned she must be one of the daughters of those wealthy expatriates at the factory, but she didn't have any shoes or socks on, which was also strange. She had tiny feet like those of a child, so delicate it seemed that they barely touched the ground.

He got up to pee, and when he went back to the window she was gone.

He saw her again the next day. She was in the same place with the same flowery dress, but this time around, she was not wearing a shawl. Her hair was long, black, and curled. Her hair flowed down her shoulders. She tried the beads on her neck one strand after the other, posing in front of the standing mirror Dreadlock Hair provided for his customers. The distance kept Bowter from making out the details of her expression, and he knew at once that he had to

create a strategy to get close to her. What if she felt his eyes on her or caught him looking at her and she was not happy about it? What if she didn't come to Dreadlock Hair again and he never again laid eyes on her?

He got up, walked across the room, pulled out his rumpled towel from his drawer, picked up a bucket in the room corner, and went out to the bathroom. He took a quick bath. After he came back and dried off, he slathered on lotion and dusted his armpits with talcum powder. Bowter couldn't remember the last time he used anything on his body or was this careful about cleaning himself, at least since he started working at the Den. For a moment he paused to think about what he was doing, the strangeness of it. He knew what was happening to him was an aberration from his life's regular, solitary course. But he could not shake off the feeling that there was something special about the woman, and he had no way of telling her that from where he was. He had to be up close. With her, watching from afar wasn't enough.

He opened the door and looked down the stairs. He went back in. He wiped his sweaty palms on his trousers, looked into the mirror again, and threw back his shoulders. When he tripped on the steps on his way down and found himself just a few feet from her, he thought in a flash that he shouldn't have come out in the first place.

She turned her head around and smiled at him. He froze. He breezed back upstairs as if borne by an invisible current.

Bowter put forth great efforts to fight what was sprouting within him. He shut his window and drew his curtains together. He willed himself to lie down on his flea-ridden bed and stare at the splotched ceiling. He did what was needed to crush the sudden attraction to the stranger that had afflicted him.

After two days of being cooped up indoors, a rage began welling up in him. The desire to see her, even touch her, had stuck to him like a flea, leached into his blood. What if he reached out his hand to touch her cheek? Would current flow between them? How would her cheeks feel? Soft? Chiselled?

Before long, Bowter became angry at himself for losing control. He wondered why someone whom he didn't even know could alter his life so quickly. He would not be controlled by a stranger. He

decided to regain control. He would go back to spying on the world, back to his vantage point.

Bowter pulled the curtains apart, flung the windows open, and opened a new bottle of waragi. He saw nothing he had not seen before—a road sweeper pushing a trash cart with rubber wheels across the street, kids playing street soccer, people buying and selling, shirtless young boys lounging against the electric pole, sweating out the lethargy and heat of the afternoon.

He let his glance fall on Dreadlock Hair's stall. She was there. He peeled his eyes away for some seconds but could not resist the urge to look at her. Soon he became transfixed by her delicate image, her smiles, her tiny feet. When he felt he was ready, he sprang out of his seat and rushed down the stairs.

A mild wind carried street litter in little eddies and rattled the roofing sheets.

Bowter looked straight at the woman when he got close enough. She smiled at him. This time his reaction was different. He saw her face. He saw her eyes. There was light in her eyes, a glint he had never seen before. There was something about those eyes, the way they reached out and seized him, eyes that spoke of a distant place, a place of bliss. It was as if all the pleasures in the world were contained in them. He wanted to become those eyes. He wanted to be one with them. Time stood still and his essence became defined by those eyes. The richness of life and death become only a small speck on some distant horizon, on a far shore that he would approach slowly through languid waters with the sticks of old age.

He opened his mouth to speak but his voice sounded hollow. He continued speaking, froth gathering at the corners of his mouth. His voice was thrown back at him. He moved closer, his hands now reaching out to touch her, as if he were groping in the dark but she turned to leave. She seemed to glide, her dress puffing and billowing in the wind. He wafted toward her like a leaf, a scent. He was light in the air. He was swift. She was fast too, moving so quickly she could well have been a phantom. He followed her, at first through the labyrinth of houses in the neighbourhood, then through a row of ruined houses, and then to a place he had never been before, the grass high and thick, the trees as thin as bamboo. The sky was a somber dark blue. He was now walking fast, almost running, freedom

suffocating him with surprise, taking over his body. He was a tethered beast broken free. She was a schoolgirl bubbling with glee. Bowter threw back his head, laughter erupting from his throat.

He followed her till they plunged into something thicker and more tangled. They slowed down. He wished he had brought a machete, something to clear the way, but forged ahead all the same, thrashing through the thick foliage. Nothing was going to come between him and the lady who had unlatched his soul. He sneezed a gout of yellow snot into the bush and wiped his fingers on the knee of his trousers. He grabbed a stick and used it to clear the path for himself until the bush became impenetrable. When he could no longer see her and was absolutely sure he could go no further, he gave up the trail. He left knowing he would see her again. He knew she would come back for him.

Drenched in sweat and his body striped with cuts, he lay out on the streets, his cheek against the cold asphalt. He could hear the sound of his own breathing, the pounding of his heart. He did not know when he drifted off to sleep.

Bowter awoke just before dawn, roused by the sound of footsteps clacking on tar, the blare of horns and voices from the streets. He was feverish and sore all over. He dragged himself up and made his way to his apartment. His head swirled. People crossed to the other side of the road to avoid him but he did not care. When he got to his apartment, he was gripped with the sudden urge to clean out his room.

He made his bed. He separated the washed clothes from the filthy ones and swept the floor and cleaned the Formica tops. He would invite her to his room. He would make her feel comfortable and maybe then he would be close enough to her to touch her. That hope gave strength to his body. The more he thought about her, the more energy surged within him.

After cleaning his house, Bowter proceeded with the task of cleaning himself. For a long time he kept at it. He washed himself rigorously as if he had just stepped out of a jailhouse. He scoured his hair, armpits, nether parts, and the soles of his feet. He gelled and combed out his tangled hair. He was satisfied with his new look and decided to go to a street-side cafeteria for breakfast. He found a place, he ate a bowl of matooke silently, and feeling refreshed, he left. It felt

good to eat something without fear of danger. He realized that he had missed the pick-up truck. They would be looking for him at the Den, but he did not care. He did not consider his actions before taking them. It was as though he were driven by a force greater than him. He was a spectator to what was happening to him.

After breakfast he roamed the neighbourhood for a while, expecting to find the lady with the flowery dress. He went to the newspaper stand and listened to the talkative vendor and his customers, nodding his head.

“The field marshal is a pure son of Africa,” the vendor said and began extolling the virtues of the president.

Bowter smiled.

He used to watch them from his window, but now he was with them. How things had changed for him.

A day went by with no sign of the woman. Bowter kept cleaning up, kept roaming the streets. Nothing else mattered to him. He thought about her. He dreamt about her. At times, the memories fused with his dreams and when they were over, it was hard to tell which it had been. Did he really run around his room with her? Did he feel her breath flutter on his face? Did she seek his lips?

The evening of the second day brought a tide of gloom. Three helmeted soldiers from the Bureau of State Research broke into his room. He knew what they wanted. He was expecting them. After a heavy blow to the head and repeated kicks, they dragged him downstairs. His head rang. He smelled blood. A salty, metallic taste slid down his throat.

He did not resist them. The blow and the kicks did not hurt him. He only laughed. He laughed as hard as he could. He laughed as though he was privy to something they were not aware of. The soldiers were not amused so they rammed the butts of their guns into his head and gut. His stomach revolted. Blood ran in rivulets down his face, but he didn't stop laughing. They cuffed him, threw him into the back of the pickup truck, and began the drive to the Den. The scales had fallen from his eyes. Now he knew nothing was going to kill him. Now he knew he was going to grow old with her. He no longer felt doomed to the same fate as the other praegustātōrēs. It did not matter how many times he consumed the Field Marshal's

meals. He was no longer scared of being thrown to the crocodiles. He was no longer scared of the Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea.

The brakes gave that terrible grinding roar.

Commander J entered the interrogation room, his arms clasped behind his back. He paced here and there for a while, his stomach heaving like a gourd dancing in water.

He gave an address about the dangers of going rogue. He then ordered for him to be locked up to drive some sense into his skull. He told Bowter he might not be so lucky next time. Bowter asked for water, and the commander slapped him across the face.

Bowter found a place against the wall of the dark cell. He stuck his tongue out, tasted blood on his swollen lips. A putrid smell engulfed him. The air was heavy with the droning of mosquitoes so he could not sleep, tired and injured as he was. He imagined his lady in another dress, a white dress, flowing, rising and falling like currents.

When he was released the following morning he resumed his search for her. He approached Dreadlock Hair and asked for her whereabouts.

"I don't know what you are saying. No girl in flowery dress came here," Dreadlock Hair said to him.

Bowter called him a liar, cursed him, and sprang at him, clutching his shirt. Dreadlock Hair had a surprised look on his face, the type of look that you would give a deranged person. Men from the newspaper stand intervened and dragged Bowter away, but he insisted that he had seen the woman.

He went back to his room, thinking and gnawing at his fingernails. An idea struck him, and he dashed out of the house. He walked through the labyrinth of houses in the neighborhood and past the rows of ruined houses. He saw no grass high and thick. No tree thin as bamboo. His ankle throbbed, his mouth denied of moisture. His feet became weary and heavy as though they were placed in chains.

He returned home, a sense of disappointment and sourness filling him. He sat on the floor of the bathroom and heaved bowl after bowl of water over himself. The water became discoloured as it washed down his body, but it did not wash away his pining for her.

In his dreams he saw her with crimson lips and sharply defined eyebrows. Her lips teased him. Her sultry voice filled him with lewd suggestions. He woke up damp and sticky. He felt the wetness slide down slowly inside his thigh. He lay exhausted on his mattress. What does one do with desire?

The following morning he dragged his sore body out of bed, took his bath, and walked to the bus stop for the pickup truck. He did not notice the grinding noise of the brakes.

He floated into the dining hall and shoved the food into his mouth without fear. The meal tasted like sawdust. The other Praegustators stared at him out of the corner of their eyes as they ate, but he did not mind. When the truck dropped him off, he went to a bar and drank till the barmaids started clearing the tables.

He lurched out into the tangle of moonlight and shadow on the streets. Slanting shafts of moonlight sifted down through the roadside eaves.

He stopped to take a piss against a wall and then wondered why the streets were so quiet. He heard sounds. Two cats shot past him, and he turned around. His feet felt cold, and he realized he wasn't wearing shoes and wondered why. He dismissed the thought and staggered on.

Bowter Bweter was approaching his apartment when a figure loomed out of the dark. A smile gathered at the corners of his mouth.

Lonely Souls

By Ntando Nzuzo

I loved Thulani the day I met him. We were thirteen back then, it was a simpler time, we spent our days; playing wheels, herding cows, and doing chores young men did on farms. I had moved from eNgcobo to Bhamshela in the early nineteen-eighties. My mother, who worked at a shop in Durban, had met and married a Zulu man from there. After my grandmother passed on – she had been raising me in eNgcobo- my mother came to fetch me. Thulani and I met at school. He was a beautiful boy. But that was a lifetime ago. I sat at Langa's Restaurant (a revamped shebeen) now, and right before me was Thulani's daughter. All of our memories, mine and Thulani's, came flooding in as I listened to her performing poetry. My table was near the stage, so I could see and hear properly. I sat there nursing my Heineken, my eyes and ears were peeled open to her.

All that is love

*If I said I loved you,
Would you say it back?
If I said I needed you,
Would you go on and pack?
Leave me empty without air,
Lungs begging for fresh air,
My poor heart with a tear
Bleeding a bloody tear?
I do love you
If you haven't a clue.
I may not show
I keep it on the down low.
I wish I had stayed,
And it weighs on me till this day,
How we ended
Without a fight.*

The audience stood up, and a thunder of applause sounded throughout the restaurant. She took an awkward bow and smiled towards the audience. It was awhile before the applause died down, and she came down from the stage. I followed her, and found her by the bar. I greeted her. She looked up from where she sat and greeted me back, and then she turned her body in a dismissive manner as she waved for the barman's attention.

"I'm sorry about your father," I said trying to catch her attention back, "He was a good and honest man," I said to her. She turned to me and examined me carefully. She gave me a little grin.

"One of our friends, an old friend of mine and your father's, told me he had passed on," I explained.

"I guess you were not that close, I don't remember seeing you at the funeral last year." she said annoyingly.

"I'm sorry to offend you..." I told her as I readied myself to go back to my seat.

"Sorry... I'm sorry. I've just been having so many people giving me their sympathies. I'm tired of it... I'm tired of them."

"Your dad was a remarkable man. He might have meant different things to different people, but that's what remarkable people do... Anyways I loved that poem. Did you write it?"

"No. My father wrote it," she said. The barman finally attended her. She asked for a cider, and asked if I was going to have anything. I pointed at my Heineken which sat still at a table opposite the room. She gestured that I take a seat. She insisted, and I obliged. So I took a seat next to her, and we started to talk about the poem she had delivered. Somehow her father crept into our conversation. How he had died, of which I already knew from our old friend, but she determined to tell me, so I listened.

“My dad was in the closet till his death. I found a letter from someone I would presume to have been his lover. The letter had in it his lovers HIV status. He stayed in the closet and found HIV in the console of other men like him.” She took a sip from her glass. “He didn’t take the treatment. He didn’t tell us. He carried his secret to the grave.” As I looked in her eyes, I saw Thulani, and at that moment I felt my eyes shedding tears. His daughter held out a piece of tissue from her pocket,

“It’s clean,” She said, “I know my father meant something different to everyone like you said. I know he was admired by most, although I do think his looks did him well in his admiration, but he was a coward in the end,” she laughed and looked at me with anewed eyes, her own, rich dark brown eyes, glinting from the bar’s smoky light. She wanted to know how I knew her father. I told her that Thulani and I were good friends a long time ago.

“What is your name?” she questioned me.

“I’m Lukhanyo Mvula,” I said drying my eyes with the tissue she had gave me. Her face lit up.

“What are the chances? God I’ve got Goosebumps. Look!” she extended her arm, “My father told us so many stories of the mischief you and he got into. Why didn’t you ever visit?”

“Life happened,” I said. I wished I had my drink with me at that point. I could feel a lump forming in my throat. She knew about me, well maybe not me in my entirety, but she knew about me. Which meant that Thulani hadn’t forgotten about me.

“Fate has a funny way of happening. I want to show you something,” she drew out a bunch of folded papers, from a pocket in her coat, and searched something,

“That’s the original copy of the poem... Look at the end of the poem (I decided to read the poem from its original state),” She

pointed at a small messy line that faded into a smudge - whilst she handed over the piece of paper.

“Lukhanyo. I think my father wrote the poem for you.” The line read, *to my lukhanyo...*

Thulani and I grew up in the South Africa where being gay was a disease. It needed correcting, fixing and curing. Nothing has changed much, but at least gay people are constitutionally protected now. So for those reasons I didn't know of any gay people, if there were any in the community, they must've been cured. I hated the truth, but one can run so far from it. It always catches up. I was gay. I am gay. And I could never change it and I don't think I wanted to. I had ran from that truth as long as I could, but it caught up with me. It caught up with me on the summer when I kissed Thulani.

It was the 7th of January 1987, and our matric results had been released that morning. So in high spirits Thulani and myself went to Langa's Shebeen, a local shebeen, to drink the night away. We had sneakered out late at night. And stayed at the shebeen till the roosters were screaming *cock-a-doodle-doo* in the darkness of the morning. We left the shebeen, arms hanging over each other's shoulders. In the cold starred morning we walked in a lonely road. We talked about this girl Thulani had slept with a week before. Boys then had a frequent need to share things relating to sex just to prove their masculinity. Feeling jealous, and being a boy approaching adulthood as a virgin, I made up a fable on the spot. That was the only way in securing your manhood, you had to have a better story. I told him about this white girl I had met when I had gone to Wartburg to visit my aunt (I had gone there just before the end of 1986), who was a maid. I told him that we, myself and this girl, would have slept together if it weren't for my aunt. The girl wasn't pure fiction, it's just that she and I had hardly talked when I had visited my aunt, and she stared at me weirdly throughout that weekend.

I told him that my aunt had caught us kissing after she had left us together in the girls house.

That sure made him jealous, I was a good storyteller then, and it's not that white girls were any different from black. There was just something powerful in rare happenings, and that's why I emphasized

her skin colour. I had achieved a feat, just by kissing this supposed girl, I somehow had won. I don't know what exactly, but my story was better, and deserving of more honor than his. After telling the story he jokingly punched me on the arm. He punched me again after we had detached our bodies from one another, but this time I punched him back, and soon we were wrestling like we had done when we were younger. Taking cheap shots anywhere on the body that was exposed. This lasted until a misstep made me fall on the gravel road. He started laughing out loudly in the dark empty street. I stayed on the ground powerless, and started laughing too as I promised him that I will avenge for that sooner. After a while I found power and rose from the ground and dusted myself up. He stood not so far away guffawing and holding his belly in strained pain.

I stood there while he was laughing looking angrily at him as I planned my next step. I neared him, and took a failed shot at his stomach. He caught both my hands, and in the drunk absence of mind, and in the cold darkness, I stole a kiss. I had dreamt about kissing him for so long, so much so that when it finally happened it felt imaginary, like it was another dream, and our lips seemed to be suspended by an illusionary trick. It was a head rush.

After having gained a clear sense of what I had done I withdrew my lips from his. Under the neatly lit sky he sighed, and buried his face in his hands. I looked on confused and ready to apologize. He let out an extended yelp as if he were crying to God. Once more he looked at me, his beautiful dark eyes reading me slowly and carefully, and then he turned to the way back to Langa's Shebeen.

He left me there, I was startled at my doing, and surprised that he hadn't said or done a thing about it. After having accepted that the past was cemented, and that the kiss would now live amongst us, and that nothing could erase it now, I too went on my way. The moon glared in embarrassment as I made my way home. I would have liked to believe that I had heard Thulani calling after me, but as I turned to see if I could still make out his figure in the miserable morning, the darkness seemed to have swelled him up, deep into its belly. He was nowhere to be seen, it was just me and the crying roosters. When I turned, to my left, the way that led home from the main road. I ran. Under the milky light of the heavens I observed the loose rocks that lay along the drenches of motor vehicle wheeled trails. I brushed

through the tall grass that grew on the sides of the driveway. My house wasn't too far off the turn from the main road. And I was gradually approaching it. What had I done?

I reached home, and as I opened the gate, something in me told me I wasn't quite finished running. I wasn't too far away, and I needed to be far enough, from everything, and everyone. Maybe I could scream my lungs out into the navy clear skies, I reckoned. I decided to run to the open fields that were behind a neat fence that ran along the edge of our garden. When I finally reached the fields, where the driveway disappeared into fresh green grass, I stared at the skies, the stars looked like lost lonely souls desperately searching for God, but their quest was doomed to fail. I stared at the beaming moon, and listened to the distant barking dogs. I couldn't really cry, I didn't want to anyways, how would crying help. I just needed him. I needed him to be okay. I needed him to tell me that we were okay.

It must have been a day or two later that we finally saw each other again after that night. I was in my room when I heard his baritone voice talking to my stepfather in our kitchen. My stepfather told him to look for me in my room. When he was in my room he gave me a casual greeting, and asked for us to talk outside. I followed him as we made our way outside. My stomach was turning in a nervous manner. When we were outside, an uncomfortable silence settled in our midst, it was an uncommon frightening thing, that had never known us. Thulani and I used to talk until our mouths went dry, and after that we would talk some more. We walked until we found ourselves near my gate. He finally spoke, but he wasn't looking at me as he spoke, he was looking straight ahead towards my neighbour's house.

"Man, what happened will not happen again... It can't happen again. Do you know what they do to people like... There is no happiness for the gay," he said still looking away from me.

"I'm sorry I didn't mean to."

"Lukhanyo you are special to me. And I truly wish I could be brave for you."

“What do you mean?” I asked him, “Thulani was the kiss unwanted?” I asked.

“I do love you...”

“I love you too,” I said reaching for his hand, and taking it in mine. Bhamshela seemed to be still sleeping, even though the sun was now approaching west. There was no one in sight. I held his hand in the safeness of the quite village.

“Lukhanyo,” he looked at me, “I’ve always loved you, but I love you enough to know that by
God we are doomed.”

“Please don’t quit before we even try. They will all understand, and if not now, they will one day. I promise you.” He took his hand away from mine and pocketed both of them in his jeans. He looked away from me to the neighbour’s house again.

“Fine... Maybe we’ll be the lucky ones,” he said. His voice quivered in emotion, “I’ll see you tomorrow. I’ve got to go with my mother to town today. She wants to send a letter to my brother.” After searching for any spies he gave me a quick peck on the cheek, and then he left me standing with magic in my belly.

But he left for Johannesburg the following week. He left early in the morning without saying goodbye. He took the bus to Durban, and from there he took the train to Johannesburg. Well at least that’s what his mother told me. His brother had got him a job at the store he worked in. Some weeks later I went to Unizulu and did my teaching degree there. I had a feeling that he would never come back, but after three years of not coming back he came to fetch his mother. I was busy writing exams when he came so I never saw him. According to my stepfather he was working in Pretoria, but he wasn’t sure what he was doing. During that time (when Thulani was away) I served my hour of darkness. I had come-out to my mother. She made a circus out of it by taking me to countless spiritual people to revoke the demons that lived inside me. It didn’t work, and she crucified me

for it. I had allowed the devil to possess me was what she said in one of our conversations.

We never were the same after I came out. We became estranged till her death. I buried her on the farm. I travelled from Vryheid, and I buried my mother, I owed her that much. I never blamed or hated my mother for her ignorance, she was after all a victim of other people's ideas. After I got my degree, in 1991, I went to Pretoria, maybe to look for him or maybe to get away from the life I knew, and to seek if it were possible to lead a different one. Of course I never saw him again.

But here I was now sitting next to his daughter. He had thought about me all these years. Thulani had thought about me. That was enough I thought. He must have loved me, and although it was many years ago, I felt my love for him sneak into my heart, and caught myself overwhelmed with emotions. I looked at his daughter, who was a resemblance of her father in every way possible, as she drunk her cider, not minding my silent recollection of the past.

"You know what. I think I might have that drink," I turned to the barman,

"Barman may I please have a cold Castle lager." I took off my blazer, and hang it on the chair,

"You've got to tell me what became of my dear old friend. Everything! Was he a good father?" I asked.

Alcohol sufficiency syndrome

By Erhu Amreyan

Rhema poured himself another drink from the half empty bottle of whiskey that stood on the oval glass table. For a while, he had been staring at the sky and watching the clouds come together. The light of the silvery moon shone as was allowed by the clouds. “It’s going to rain. Damn!”

His focus returned to the party that was going on. The music blared out in fast rhythms and no one cared for anything else other than the booze and to get on the dance floor and dance the night away. Sweaty bodies grinded on each other and the stench of cigarette smoke and vomit filled the air. But no one cared.

Rhema filled his glass with the dregs of alcohol and gulped it down just to keep himself from shouting. He had been at the party for three hours and all the girls he had asked to dance with him had shot him down. He was getting frustrated. His eyes went to his best friend, Sunny who was having the time of his life. Sunny had organized the party at his place and invited a bunch of friends over. Why? Because he had the money to waste and throwing parties was his best way of doing that.

Sunny’s parents were filthy rich and he was their only child and so was pampered beyond reason. In addition to that, he was also handsome and well built. With all these, he had girls around him all the time like addicts to coke. Rhema hated him.

Rhema suddenly noticed a girl in a tight yellow dress. She was swaying her hips in a seductive manner and licking her lips, all the while staring at him. Rhema was happy at last. “Finally,” he said and made to get up from where he sat but then he noticed the girl using her finger to beckon at someone. It was not him, but the guy behind him.

“Ahhhhhhh!” he groaned sitting back down and placed his head on the table.

“Oh boy, what’s wrong with you?” Sunny was at Rhema’s side, grinning widely. On his left hand was an unopened bottle of champagne.

“Tonight I’m having bad luck with women. No one wants me.” Sunny laughed at his friend and patted him on his back.

“You’ve always had bad luck with women. It didn’t start today.” Rhema eyed his friend.

“And you know what’s worse? That girl over there just gave me unnecessary blue balls. Like I need that tonight.”

“Which girl?” Rhema pointed at the girl in yellow dress who was now grinding slowly on the guy she had beckoned. “The slut over there.”

“That’s Natasha. She’s a good friend of mine. But she’s not worth your time.”

“I need to get laid bro and I don’t see that happening tonight.”

“Guy, cheer up. Don’t worry. I’ll find someone for you.” Sunny shook his friend’s hand and went back to the party. About five minutes later, the rain started falling and everyone moved hurriedly into the house. The lone couch and two sofas were moved back to create a space for more dancing. Rhema wished he was dancing but it seemed there were more guys than girls that night. It was a total sausage fest. The very first one. Sunny’s parties were usually the opposite. “Where is Sunny?” Rhema asked no one in particular. He went searching for his friend and found him shoving his tongue down two girls’ throat simultaneously.

“I guess I ain’t getting none of that tonight.” The thought depressed him so much he thought of begging a girl, any girl for some charity. But alas, his pride took over and he decided to drink instead. He went over to the bar but had to jump over someone who had passed out on the ground. He took a bottle of foreign scotch from it to the room adjoining the master’s bedroom and slumped on the comfortable bed.

Rhema had to stand up a few minutes later to put on the ceiling fan when the room became hot. The sound that came from it was enough to scare the devil himself. Rhema had asked Sunny to fix it a couple of times and his answer remained the same; “I will fix it but I have to call the electrician first.” The fan still whirled like an old man trying to do jumping jacks at its lowest level and at its highest peak, it felt as if a train was approaching as an earthquake was in progress.

Rhema stood in the middle of the room and sang every song that came to his mind after which he fell asleep. When he woke up,

everyone was gone and the house had already been cleaned up. It was as if nothing had happened the previous night. He was even more surprised that he felt perfectly fine. He had no hangover to show for all the drinking. He found it quite odd. He walked to the sitting room and met Sunny watching television.

“Dude, what happened to you last night? I was looking for you.” Sunny said putting off the TV.

“And I was looking for you.” Rhema asserted.

“I’ve got the perfect girl for you. You didn’t think I forgot did you?” Sunny’s eyebrows shot up. Rhema rolled his eyes.

“I needed the girl last night.”

“What are you talking about? Beggars can’t be choosers.”

Rhema had to agree with him.

“Who’s she?”

“Her name is Miranda.” Sunny said looking at his phone. “I called her already. You’ll have to take her out and show her a good time before you can spelunk her.”

“Why?”

“Her boyfriend just dumped her so she is planning to get some revenge. Be nice. You can take my car.” Rhema hated receiving favors from Sunny but he needed to get laid quickly.

“We have a class today you know? Mr. Eriti may set a test.”

“Who cares?” Sunny said with indifference. “Your balls may explode in that class. She’ll be ready by 1pm, so get your balls ready and go pick her up. Take her somewhere nice.”

“Really? Revenge sex?”

“Yes, the very best my brother.” Sunny told Rhema smiling. “I’ll be out of the house by fourish so you can bring her here.”

Rhema got his clothes ironed and shoes shined. He checked his bank account and knew he would have to depend on Sunny for a while after that day. He did not mind.

Rhema took the address from Sunny and drove out of the house after Sunny wished him good luck. The house was located in one of the most influential residential areas and Rhema got scared when he stopped in front of it. He was sure he was in the right house but it was grander than he thought. A girl came out of side gate and he quickly came out of the car to meet her. He knew at once that she was Miranda from the pictures Sunny had shown him. With her curvy

swaying hips and twin heavenly breasts that seemed too huge for the shirt that she wore, Rhema licked his lips. Her jean trouser hugged her lower body so tight it was hard to ignore.

“Miranda?” Rhema asked to confirm.

“Yes.” Miranda confirmed.

“Wow.” Rhema said without trying to hide his surprise. “You look stunning.”

“Thank you.” Miranda said offering her hand for a handshake. Her smile revealed a perfect set of white teeth. “You must be Rhema.”

“Yes, very pleased to meet you”

“Shall we?” She urged him.

“Yes, yes.” Rhema said smiling as he opened the passenger door for her. She threw in her hand bag before getting in stylishly.

“Where are we heading to?” she asked.

“Eva plaza.”

“That’s a good place.” Miranda nodded in afterthought. The place had been recommended by Sunny.

When they arrived at the towering building, they went straight to the restaurant on the second floor. There were only a handful of people there. She ordered a sundae and Chinese fried rice. Rhema ordered a chicken hamburger and diet coke. They talked as they ate.

“So, you and Sunny,” Rhema ventured to ask, “where did you guys meet?”

“At a friend’s party. He is a very cool guy.”

“That, he is.”

“I heard you are childhood friends.”

“That’s true. What are you studying?”

“Microbiology, my first year.”

“How do you find the school?”

“Hectic.” Rhema laughed and so did Miranda. “Sometimes I wish I didn’t have to go to school. I just want to party all day and all through the night.”

“But alas, we can only wish.”

“Yes. My parents are very strict people and they expect the best.” There was silence for while and only their food kept them busy.

“It’s hard to believe someone would let you go. I heard about your boyfriend. I’m so sorry.” Rhema said that and meant it as a

complement but for the next one hour, Miranda talked about her ex boyfriend. She said he was the biggest douche bag she'd ever met with rage in her eyes and at other times she talked about him in a soothing voice and praised him. Rhema wished he had kept his mouth shut or had talked about the weather. He was glad when she stopped talking.

"I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't be talking about my ex with you here."

"No, no," Rhema protested, "I assure you, it is fine." Rhema's eyes were set upon the future and so endured whatever she threw at him.

"Maybe we should go somewhere else." Miranda suggested.

"Where?"

"The flower and statue garden downtown perhaps."

"Ok."

Rhema paid for the drinks and food and they both headed downtown. The security guard at the gate of the garden made faces as Rhema drove in and found a spot in the parking lot. He still was not used to having young men and women parade the garden especially since he knew the motives of most of them. Rhema and Miranda strolled around the garden taking in the beautiful scenery. They moved around the statues at the extreme end in hopes of being alone. They mimicked several of the statues laughing as they did. They spent a long time admiring and laughing at a statue of a rather ugly policeman holding a man by the trousers.

"What crime do you think he committed?" Rhema asked jokingly.

"Probably stole a chicken." Rhema laughed out loud not knowing why he was. Nothing about her answer was funny.

"You're so funny." Rhema said.

"Thank you Rhema. You're not so bad yourself. I wish more guys were like you. You're so nice and sweet."

"If all guys were like me I wouldn't be any special."

"You know what I mean."

"I do." He smiled and winked at her. She laughed and touched his arm. The future was looking promising to Rhema.

Without any warning, there was a flash of light from the sky. To everyone it looked like a thunderstorm. The beams of light struck the

ground in several places. A few screams erupted from different corners and died down after the flashes of light vanished. An eerie silence followed that made chills run down everyone's spine. Miranda who was scared drew closer to Rhema and hugged him tight, her bosom rubbing against his chest. The future became even clearer to him.

Rhema was holding on to Miranda when he noticed a moving shadow loom over them. He turned around to look at what was behind them only to find the statues of the policeman and the fleeting supposed criminal moving. Rhema froze. The policeman turned to look at him straight in the eyes. Rhema screamed at the top of his lungs and pushed Miranda aside. She fell on the floor and twisted her ankle in the process. The other statues all started to come alive and move about destroying anything and anyone on their path.

"Rhema help me!" Miranda shouted as Rhema ran for his life. "Every man for his own self!" Rhema shouted his reply. He glance back for a moment and saw Miranda being hacked to pieces.

"Jesus save me!" Rhema kept screaming as he dodged the statues heading his way. The statue of a soldier with a gun began firing stone bullets in all direction. Rhema dodged the bullets like a pro. He bumped into another screaming man whom he recognized as the security man. Both of them continued to run towards the building at the corner of the garden but was waylaid by a statue of a woman brandishing a cutlass. Rhema quickly ducked as she swung her weapon of destruction, but his companion was not so lucky. His head flew off his body. Rhema yelled at the top of his lungs. His voice had become so strained one would have thought a woman was screaming. Rhema quickly entered the building and barred the door behind him.

He kept on panting as he peered outside the window. Another woman was mauled down by the statue of a lion as she tried to get to the building where Rhema was hiding. Rhema made the sign of the cross and started a prayer in Latin. He was surprised he still knew how to pray. As he prayed, he did not notice the stature of a child with three legs behind him creeping slowly. Not until it grabbed him from behind did he realize his peril. Rhema used all his strength to fight off the monster. He kept on screaming 'Jesus save me!' until he finally succeeded in loosening the grip of the statue.

He had no other choice but to make a run for his car. He ran with blinding speed towards the parking lot and succeeded in getting there. One of the skewered statues began throwing huge stones at the cars in the parking lot and a lot of sirens went blaring in the process. The gate had already been shattered to pieces leaving a gaping hole in its stead. Rhema drove like a maniac back to Sunny's house. He kept the engine running as he jumped out of the car. He ran inside and bellowed his friend's name.

"Sunny! Sunny!" Rhema's entire body convulsed uncontrollably.

"In here." Sunny answered from within the house. Rhema met his friend in the room next to the master's bedroom smoking a joint. The fan was turned on to its highest peak. "How was it? Where's the girl?" He asked, his speech a bit slurred.

"She's dead! They're all dead!"

"Say what?"

"They're dead. Statues came to life and fucking killed them all!"

"Who fucked them all?"

"People are dead. Miranda is dead!"

"Sorry man."

"What?" Rhema could not believe his friend gave no thought about him after what he had just gone through. "Fuck you Sunny! Get up and let's get outta here."

"Say what?"

"We have to get outta here before we die too, you stupid idiot." Rhema shouted.

"If people are dying outside, why do you want to go outside?"

Rhema thought about it for a while. "Ok." He sat down tentatively

"That's it. We stay here, smoke some weed," Sunny said before the fan flew off its hinges and sliced off his head.

Rhema's eyes slowly opened to find Sunny staring at him with laughing eyes, "Fool, wake up." He said.

Rhema felt the pang of headache and he groaned in pain. The dizziness he felt made him sad. He hated hangovers more than anything in his life yet he could not stop drinking.

"What happened?" Rhema asked.

"You went crazy man!" Sunny told his friend. "You started break dancing like a worm and then you started singing *Shinedown's*

sound of madness. Word for word. You sang the song lyric after lyric. Then you went around telling everyone you created the sound of madness.” Rhema made a face and tried to stand up. He looked around his surrounding and found two guys and a girl sprawled haphazardly on the tiled floor.

“What about the statues?”

“What statues?”

“Oh thank God.” Rhema sighed. Sunny shook his head and asked “what were you dreaming about? You looked like you were dying.”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you” Rhema said laughingly and proceeded to throw up on his friend’s legs.

BACKFIRE

By Natisha Parsons

Tinker took home a compendium of games for his family. He decided to have it out with them concerning the solvent that Sean had spoken of.

Sean's words stuck in his mind like faeces to a blanket. *Alcohol... excellent solvent... dissolves family relationships. They were discussing me, I just know it! They couldn't wait for me to leave the room. The no-good rubbishes! I'll show them.*

Finally! The day had come. He'd warm them up with the games. He knew they were new to his children... unless they were introduced to them at school? He didn't think so. Anyway, too bad. Today they'd play his game... the game he used to play with his cruel father. *Hub! They should'a had him for their father!* Draughts. He didn't need to tell them that those games ended with blood, snot and tears. He didn't need to tell them his mother hid in her room while they played with a pillow over her head vainly trying to shut out her son's cries and his father's foul language; waiting in awful dread for her 'turn'.

Tinker was firmly of the opinion that a man had the right to whip *his* wife with *his* sjambok⁶ in *his* house when *he* felt she needed it. His mother caught it; his wife... well... who the heck was *she* that she should be treated better than his mother? He seemed to forget that his father's performances drove him from home at an early age. He seemed to forget a lot of things.

He was on the wagon for a while now, ever since his liver had landed him in hospital for a week. His pancreas was found to be in a state as well. He was given a choice. He thought he had made it.

Meanwhile his family tolerated the sober man with nauseating apprehension. It was like living with a faulty time bomb.

He had overheard a conversation that was not meant for his ears. He tried to pass it off as a case of eavesdroppers not hearing good about themselves, but it wasn't working. It grated on his last nerve!

⁶ South Africa; stout whip

That night had ended very badly. He landed in hospital with a cracked skull. They had ganged up on him.

When he thought of what led up to the fight, he realised he was the cause of it. "To heck with them, I can hit my wife an' children when I feel they need it." He took their retaliation very seriously. The months of sobriety following his hospital stay was not at all easy, liver and pancreas problems notwithstanding. He'd give his missing eye teeth for a stiff double vodka.

Meanwhile the Mann home had its own saga going. Much to everyone's surprise Brandon indeed appeared to be a changed creature. His stretch in prison had mellowed him. They thought. He did things about the house that he had never deigned to touch in a long, long time. When he got in from work he cleared and cleaned the drains and the gutters, from which luxuriant clumps of vegetation cascaded. He mended the fence in the many places it was broken: the wooden poles eaten away and the metal ones corroded and twisted, suspended above the ground, held there by what barbed wire was left, and most of the barbed wire rusted and gnarled. Weekends he worked in the heat, wind and rain without as much as a single complaint. He replaced all the cracked and broken window panes. Not once did he ask the boys to lend a hand. When John did volunteer he said, "I have to do this myself, son. I have to do it all myself. Thanks all the same."

No one knew it but the hole at the back was growing. Supposedly a pit for a sizable compost heap should anyone want to know. Green manure and vegetable peelings and so on were better and cheaper than chemical fertiliser, not so? His intention was to put the entire plot under mealies and sell them in town. He had his argument off pat!

Olive was too afraid to let her guard down. The old monster she knew... this person she had yet to know. The man she married was long since dead. She remained stiff... rigid... too afraid to smile or to venture a word. Phrases raced around her mind to shut her up; phrases like "You dirty lying cow; don't believe a word she says!" and "She's a lying wonder! Even if she tells you the sun is shining outside, go make sure."

Time with its ups and downs passed as it is wont to do. En route to and from work Brandon and Tinker deliberately avoided loaded

subjects. Tinker spent lots of time helping Brandon with maintenance around the property. Rita took them coffee and biscuits for which they expressed their appreciation in terms that always made her cringe thinking *Gosh! They're overdoing it*. She didn't stop, of course.

What really fascinated both women was that with all their abusiveness, their husbands did not fail to hand them their weekly wages. What they splurged on liquor was what they made doing overtime. In spite of the corruption that had set in, Brandon insisted their families were to be taken care of financially.

And this is where he influenced Tinker. It took much convincing before Tinker finally surrendered. *"Ja, ou Brans... I know you right. But they need to appreciate a man more."*

Brandon snorted disparagingly. *"They din ask to be born!"*

End of topic.

During their sober period they handed in even their overtime envelopes.

The Mann children were having a chat. "Dad reminds me of a spring that's been weighted down and is just waiting to be released..." Andrew said.

"True, hey," said Morry, "there's just something about Dad... as if he's battling deep anger."

"What do you expect? He must be battling withdrawal symptoms. He was an alcoholic, after all."

"And once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic!" Milly was emphatic.

"Not so!" Sonja was indignant. "When God answers prayer, the alcoholic is completely delivered. I believe Dad is battling with his conscience. Think of all the things he did to Mama and to us! I think his head is a bad place to be in and he has to live with it."

"Like I said, I shall wait and see." John said.

"Me, too," Andrew added.

"Me three," Morry laughed out loud.

"That dirty heart of his won't come clean after such a short while. Deep down inside I also think he's planning his next move..." Milly was disparaging.

Sonja looked up at her out of wide, innocent eyes. “Then why go deep down? That’s where the old mean Daddy is. Why not just accept the person he is now?”

“Why not, indeed!” John stated. “For your sake, Pumpkin, we will do our best to find the heart of the new man and relate to it. It’s not ginne to be easy, but we are ginne try to kill the image of the old Dad inside us.” He looked around him at his other siblings. “Do I speak for all of us?”

Edgy sighs of resignation. “Ye-e-e-s.”

A sudden knock at the back door accompanied by the voices of the de Bruins had them shouting with excitement.

“Oh, happiness; I missed our friends,”

A “me too” chorus accompanied them in the rush to the door.

Sean and Poppy followed closely by Rita and Tinker trooped in, blowing on their hands, shouting *Brrr* and stamping their feet on the doormat. Larry brought up the rear carrying a fairly large tea towel-covered dish on his head, held there with both hands.

“Duck, dodo! The doorway!” shouted Sean.

Larry winked wickedly. “Saw it, Boet.”

The ruddy faced Poppy called out in slow measured syllables, “Hide the money. Hide the meat. Hide the booze... the de Bruins are here.” That had everyone in fits of laughter.

“Yo! Poppy, Poppy, the clown!” Tinker’s gums gleamed extra dark in the cold. Then he caressed his wife fondly along the jaw and sang, “Baby, its cold outside...”

Embarrassed by his show of affection, she shied away, shaking her head and muttering, “Oh, Tinker.”

They settled around the dining room table, bringing in the benches from the kitchen. Clearly ill at ease, Tinker soon excused himself. “Ginne go help my hardworking buddy out there,” he nodded at Olive and jerked his thumb at the door. He then crammed both hands full of fatcakes⁷, winked at Rita, and left.

Rita had made a huge batch of them much to everyone’s delight. Olive volunteered to make the coffee and left carrying the bowl of goodies back to the kitchen.

“Don’t trust y’all one lil bit,” she smiled.

⁷ Yeast dumplings deep-fried brown and crispy

“Hot coffee coming; put coasters on the table,” Olive shouted from the adjoining kitchen to be heard above the noise. Milly and Sonya jumped up and Poppy followed Petra to the kitchen.

She soon entered the noise-filled room, precariously carrying two coffee pots. “Whew! Must be the smell of the coffee got y’all so souped up. The noise!” she sighed as she placed the pots on the coasters. “Such a wonderful sound... happy noise.”

“Boys,” she indicated with her head, “trays, please.” They fetched the trays and Petra fetched the milk and sugar.

“Can I go fetch the goodies?” Larry.

A communal “He-e-ey” went up.

Elbows far back, crouched, Larry assumed the “go!” position and scooted.

“Imagine! Forgetting the goodies!” Sean stood bolt upright and saluted his brother when he marched in, with a muttered, “Hup, two, three, four...” the large dish held in outstretched hands.

“No gobbling,” Morry shouted around a mouthful.

“Morry!” gasped Sonya and promptly choked. John banged her back till she was alright.

Much giggling and protesting turned the impromptu meal into a hilarious get together. Olive had to share the goodies because there seemed to be some very fast eaters.

“Boys!” Rita laughed affectionately.

“Indeed,” Olive said,

“And so say all of us,” sang Milly, “but not in a nice way!”

“Ah, she loves us,” Andrew said, putting an arm around her shoulders.

“Take away your greasy hands,” she scolded.

“Ooh, serviettes,” Petra muttered and jumped up.

Afterwards the children remained seated around the dining room table paring off to play the board games Poppy had brought. “These games have a history,” she hissed, holding the box up and shaking it.

“Yep! But we know how to play them now. Nice.”

“Da’ likes draughts. And it’s not so bad.”

“Poppy likes snakes and ladders. I don’t. I hate it when a snake swallows me.”

“We play at school during break.”

“My favourite board game is scrabble, but these are okay.”

The lively conversation soon toned down when they paired off to play the games.

Olive and Rita started in the kitchen to clean up and then went to the lounge, sliding the door closed behind them.

Brandon and Tinker soon came in from the brisk wintry outdoors. “Daddy’s home,” shouted Poppy excitedly.

“That’s a warning. My children are becoming good little actors,” Rita whispered and they separated, each with a magazine from the coffee table.

Brandon went off to the bathroom and Tinker to the sitting room.

“Coffee?” Petra

“You angel, yes, please. Any fatcakes left?” Tinker

“Just one guess, Da’.” Sean

“Ja-nee,” Tinker flashed his huge toothless grin and strode to the sliding door. “Does this really keep the noise out?” The players didn’t seem to hear that.

You have no idea.

He joined the ladies. “Close the door!” Poppy shouted.

Larry had some news. “Hey y’all, I see Uncle Bran’s digging a beeg hole down there... behind out house.” He demonstrated with outstretched arms. “Whatchu think it’s for?”

“A hole, hey? Perhaps he’s planning to bury you alive.” Morry giggled at him and Andy chipped in, “He’d better kill you first. Imagine swallowing all that sand! Yuck!”

“It’s not a joke, hey... what do you think it’s for?”

John stared daggers at him. “Cut it out, Larry, Dad could be digging a hole for any reason. Maybe he’s making a manure pit... a compost thing ummy. Maybe he’s planning...oh ... something. Why don’t we ask him?”

“Let him shower in peace first.” Sonya snapped.

The games came to a sudden end when Brandon, smelling of cologne and hair crème passed through. Petra jumped up to fetch his coffee. All eyes turned to John and Larry.

“Let him finish his coffee. *Haan*⁸! What’s the hurry?” Sonya

“True dat, true dat. No hurry in South Africa. Back to de snakes an’ de ladders,” Larry did that thing with his lankiness, slouching, crossing his arms and swaying to and fro, head perfectly still.

Eventually Sonya said, “I’m sure Da’s finished his coffee. Listen to him; he’s laughing his head off.”

“Da’s crowing!” Sean grinned wickedly.

“The ladies aren’t.” Milly

“Hm; they’re quiet.” Petra

“Da’ must be telling his dirty jokes.” Larry

“I wish aunt Ollie can chase him out!” Poppy was upset.

John left the table.

He soon returned and said, “Like I said, it’s for making his own compost; it’s a green manure dump! And by the way, if you have any fresh vegetable off-cuts, you know where to dump them.” The matter cleared up, they returned to their games.

Three months later, almost to the day, Brandon and Tinker de Bruin decided they had been in hiding long enough. Their vocabulary was very colourful and best left to the readers’ imagination.

“Let’s break out of prison, bru and go on a spree...”

“A spree to beat all spees,” Brandon didn’t hesitate for a second. He threw down the tool he was holding and immediately grabbed it up again. “Yo! I’m not in my garden,” he exclaimed. *And my preparations are ready. Long time... ready and waiting. Tonight might be a good time. I’ll have to tell this oke⁹. Tonight is tonight. Tomorrow I’ll be a grieving widow... widower....* His thoughts put a mysterious smile on his face.

Tinker laughed gleefully. He rubbed his hands and did some rapid on the spot jogging. He was excited. They were going on a spree!

We ginne paint the town red ...

...with purple spots

....and splashes of yellow

....ba-a-a! Ha-a-a! Haaaaa!

...again! One more time! The boys are BACK.

⁸ Exclamation to show impatience; sounds like how

⁹ Chap; pronounced oak

During their brief sober period their long suffering families painfully endured the rickety peace they were struggling to fully accept.

On that fateful night, they went straight to the pub from work. Anticipating bawdiness from their mates, they tiptoed in. Tinker held a finger to his lips; a look of pure mischief on his face. Brandon brought up a more self-conscious rear.

“Behold! They creepeth in...” Perry, the barman shouted, “like snails...”

“Unwillingly?”

“I think not.”

The drunken wit had the room in stitches including those over whose heads the bard flew.

Their heart-warming welcome had them all hugging and shouting vulgarities at each other in brotherly love. They were robustly toasted and then Tinker called for silence.

When he was satisfied that he had the full attention of everyone present including the strangers, he held up his glass and said, “Here’s to the breaking of a long, long fast!” He drew back his arm, pulled a decidedly strange face, exposing his gums and epiglottis, and threw the glass into the wall with all his might.

Pandemonium.

“For they are jolly good fellows...”

A passerby would be forgiven for thinking he was passing the cats and dogs section of the SPCA at feeding time.

Finally a form of peace descended on the place. Tinker ordered another drink which someone quickly offered to sponsor. He tipped the drink into his wide open mouth and down his throat in one gulp, set the glass down hard and went into a fit of coughing. Those close by jumped from the spray and someone banged his back vigorously.

Attention veered to his almost silent partner.

Someone shouted, “Oo de Mann?”

“Brandon Mann, Brandon Mann...”

The chant continued until Brandon lifted his shot glass and drank it at one go. The booming rhythmic yell went up, “Go Mann, go! Go Mann, go!”

Someone changed it to, “De man-go!” to the rollicking amusement of the jolly crowd. Tinker took up his second drink,

“Watch out liver, here it comes; give way pancreas, Tinker be de boss an Tinker call de shots.”

The crowd found that funny, too.

“No probs, Teeza, we’ll just have a funeral. You’ll be the man who put the ‘fun’ into funeral. Show dem organs who de man.”

“Yep! We’ll do it township style, bru. A funeral fit for a king.”

“King Rat!” someone shouted. “King of the Cow Shed queens.”

The Cow Shed was the name given to a girls’ hostel for reasons known to all the men. A great pity that all were painted with the same brush.

“Hey, guys, cut that out...cut it out.”

“Shpeak, O toothless one!” someone yelled.

“Cut it out, guys. You heard Tinker,” Brandon began to feel uneasy. Tinker’s temper was best left undisturbed.

Eventually they staggered out, holding onto each other singing lustily, “*Show me the way t’ go home, I’m ti’ed an’ I wanna go t’ bed.*”

In Brandon’s van, they sat back, undecided.

“I’m drunk, ou pal. Can you trust my driving?”

“Hit’it, pal, if we die we die. We never died before why we’ll die now? You c’n drive, *ne’er mine*¹⁰ the drunk... drink... ne’er mine...,” Tinker’s head wobbled as he spoke.

“Home... home we go... I’ll show her... just one word outa that big mouth o’ hers and its curtains...” Tinker was in fine form. He passed a finger across his throat, an ominous sound coming from his mouth.

“Sh... sh... shame goezh for Olive. I’ve had planzh f’ her fra long time. Maybe... hey... Tinksh, olshap... chap... I’ve got a brill...brill...”

“Brilliant?” laughed Tinker. “Firs’ time I hear you battle to *shpeak*, ou Brans.”

“Yep! That kind of idea. Hey my head is mix up big time...” he held a hand to his head and slowed down to a crawl.

¹⁰ Never mind

“Yeah, you swigged too much too quick, ou Brans. When you been off the sauce a long time you gotta take it easy when you come back. Chune-chune¹¹, what’s the good idea?”

“We at the gate, *ou pal*... tell you udder... udder... dat side.”

Tinker did the honours as usual. When the gate was closed again, he jumped in and continued...

“Shoot, *ou maat*¹², whatser idea?”

Brandon stopped the van. He breathed deeply, trying hard to steady his head. Not succeeding he turned to look at Tinker anyway.

“Tonight Ollie’s ginne bite the dust... off to her happy hunting grounds. I gotta be free...”

“Now you scarin’ me ou maat. You scarin’ me sober... I need a top up. That’s too much...”

“...screw the top up! Where’s your courage? Stick it to the sticking place!” Brandon quoted Lady Macbeth with a toss of his head and a mincing tone.

Tinker laughed. “You an’ your Shakespeare! I hav’n got that dame’s courage, ek sê, ou Brans.”

“Oh... you wanna hire a hitman?”

Tinker jerked in shock. “Don’t go there, ou Brans... don’...”

“Sorry, Teeza. I wasn’ thinking. But listen to me... I’m serious... *see-ree-us*, ou pal. My life is shi*...shi*... shi*. I wanna get out!

Brandon turned carefully in his seat to look Tinker square in the eyes. “We been through a lot together, whatchu say, ou Tink... Tinks?” He slapped his forehead hard and exclaimed in sheer frustration: “Ma-a-an... dis head o’ mine!”

“f course. Chune-chune ... you got me nervous, *ek sê*.”

“Calm down,” he patted an imaginary something. “Calm down. I’m suffer-*r-r-ing*,” He groaned then continued, rubbing the back of his neck and massaging his temples. “I bin digging a hole at the back of your place... down the bottom there...” He rotated his troublesome head.

“Yeah, I yeard ‘boutcher green manure projec’.”

Brandon was sobering up fast... he became quite excited.

¹¹ Tune- slang for talk

¹² Old friend

“Green manure project my foot! I’m digging a grave! That dirty cow don’t know it yet but tonight she’s off to happy hunting grounds.” He spoke matter-of-factly, still rotating his tortured head.

Tinker pursed his lips and gave a low whistle.

“My children and I will be better off without her...” Brandon continued animatedly, grabbing hold of Tinkers lapels and shaking him. Tinker vigorously shrugged himself loose trying not to seem aggressive. Brandon let go and continued. “To tell you the truth, ou Teeza, I bin serious...*se-e-eriously* thinking of putting them away, too. They betrayed me. They betrayed *m-e-e-e*...their father. Dogs! Dogs, I tell you. They bit me in the ‘ackside when I wasn’t looking.”

“That’s hectic, *oupal*... but I year¹³ you *ou*... I year you.” He threw back his head and laughed uproariously.

“Hey, you, cover your mouth! And don’t start *that* again!” The disgusted Brandon wiped a hand across his face.

“Now I remember something else from school,” Brandon said. “Doing King Lear... Shakespeare... that old bally¹⁴ from England gave us such a hard time at school...”

Tinker spread his hands and shrugged in an *and-your-point-is* gesture.

Brandon continued, “Never knew I’d be in the same situation. Me... Brandon Mann! Here, lemme think... his words go something like this: *to have thankless children is sharper than a snake’s tooth*...”

“...fangs. Snakes got fangs. I also went to school. Same year¹⁵, ou maat, same year... I also got a ungrateful fam’ly. “

“Shut up and listen. I’m talking. He din say fangs.... An’he din say snake he said serpent, for sure.”

“Beside the point, ou pel. Soun’s more like you in a *situation* to me...” He laughed at his own crudity.

Brief silence.

“Their fangs got me. What did I do to earn this? My own flesh n blood?! I gave them my blood, they gave me they poison... and it’s all that witches fault! She’s ginne pay.” The look on his face personified evil. His tone was chilling.

¹³ hear

¹⁴ Bu-lee (pronounced)

¹⁵ here

“To tell you the truth, ou Tinks, I came into the world alone, I can go on alone. I’ll give them sleeping pills. I’ll put it in their morning tea. We’ll get pally-pally when they mother is gone an’ they see she’s not coming back. Then I’ll put just one match to the house. Enough petrol and just one match.” He held up an index finger dramatically, waving it excitedly. “Now you know my plans.”

Tinker shuddered. He stared at nothing in the inky distance. Finally he collected himself. “I think I can add to your load tonight ...”

Brandon slowly turned his head and looked at him, narrowed eyes almost shut. He mimicked Tinker’s *and-your-point-is* gesture.

Tinker burst out again. He slapped his forehead and laughed louder, doubling over. The motion resulted in flatus... lengthy, loud and vile. Brandon opened his door and rolled out onto the grass, on his hands and knees. Tinker did the same thing on his side. Then he crawled around the vehicle.

“The toothless one at that end has spoken... jeepers creepers! I officially rename you Stinker. Stinker de Bruin. A really, really good name. You just proved it. Ollie named you Stinker for different reason. She should get a niff of *tha-a-at!*” He half turned and pointed, quite disgusted. “You sobered me up... quick-quick. Sharpshoot sober-upper.” He spat disgustedly.

“A wrong pong, ou Brans.” Tinker was enjoying the fun. He opened his mouth wide and grated out a loud, throaty, guttural laugh.

“Shut that face of yours,” Brandon snapped irritably, “you wanna tell them we here?”

“Sh-h-h,” he put a finger to his lips and finally did quieten down. “Nay, ou Brans, that *was* bad. Castor oil for me... Listen... tonight our troubles will be over. But let’s plan prop’ly, bru; the chu’reus mus’n’t see. Those boys is gettin too big for dey boots! An I wanna kiss Ollie for giving me a new name. I shoulda known long ago, I’d said thank you prop’ly.” Brandon chose to ignore that. *If there’s space I think I’ll include this raw oke in that hole. And good riddance to bad rubbish.* He suddenly began to laugh quietly. “An’ before you ask I’m enjoying thoughts of my freedom from bad rubbish... good riddance.”

“You can say that again.”

“I won’t. Once is enough. You was saying... oh yes, the fleabags, though they big now... too right. Too big! If we really, really quite

we can creep in and tell ‘em we got a surprise in the car. And that won’t be lying, ‘cept the surprise is somewhere else.”

“You think they’ll b’lieve us? Maybe they will... we bin on our bes’ for a long, long time. An’ you, ou Brans, busy as a one-legged rugby player.” They both laughed too loudly and too long. Brandon wiped the tears from his eyes. “You ginne make me chuck up, Teeza – all this laughing is making my stomach...” he dived over onto his knees and did what he had to do.

Back in the bakkie, Brandon warmed again to his mission. “Teeza, phooey... the air is still radioactive!” He briefly fanned his face and continued. “You wanna see what I got prepared in the garden? *Hell*, why not...” he started up the engine. “Let’s go see the hole right now before we fill it. Not ginne bury the whole bull lot! ‘Nother day, ou maat; dis one’s too small. Anyway, I think the petrol plan is best. Maybe we can plan for yours to come sleep over.” He laughed grimly. “But... *tonight is tonight!*”

“Tonight is tonight, *for sure*,” muttered Tinker.

They went as far as it was possible to go without the noisy contraption waking the lighter sleepers.

“Hey... don’ bang the door.” Brandon’s hoarse stage whisper came just in time. Tinker drew in his breath sharply and let the door go slowly without actually engaging it.

Gingerly, led more by instinct, they slowly progressed in the dark, holding onto each other. Very stealthily... around the huge oak tree where they used to have such memorable get-togethers...

... *mind the cabbages growing right here, I think ...*

... *not so close to your house... come... this way...*

Wham! Bam! Bam! Down went the furtive fathers ... like wooden butlers in a sudden gust of wind.

Drat!

Brandon’s newly heaped potato patch!

Mirthless self-deprecating snickering.

They struggled up, shook off the clinging damp soil, and cautiously furthered their journey, urged on by dogged determination.

Purpose-driven buddies.

Suddenly the moon...

Sighs of relief.

Quickly Brandon led the way and there eerily in the moonlight it yawned before them:

...there

...the communal grave!

"It's big enough for two... mor'n big enough, my china, mor'n big enough," hissed Tinker hoarsely.

Swallow my problems forever!

"It will swallow all our problems, *ou maat... a-a-a-all* our problems...for-e-*verrrr*." In the light of the moon Brandon's smirk was positively chilling.

"And e-*ver-r-r-r*... Ah-h-h-men," Tinker tried to suppress his giggle but it spilt out as a funny squeaky sound. Home was *so* close....

Then Tinker had a brainwave...

"Bru," he whispered close to Brandon's ear, "this is funeral night. Funerals needs flowers, *nê*? Look over der'... Rita got lots n lots a those little purple ones... chris... chris... chris... chris-something... wait here. It's not far." Tinker sped off looking quite comical doubled over, elbows pumping seriously, knees lifted high as he sped forth. Soon he was back with an armful, grinning from ear to ear. "Chrissamums...I 'member," he slapped his forehead. Their perfume filled the air.

Tinker giggled as quietly as he was able... Home was *so* close....
Like she always be at home.

Snicker, snort, snicker...

Suddenly pitch darkness. Briefly they looked up at the cloud-covered moon.

"Shh! Softly-softly! No noise!

Suddenly a light went on in the bathroom at his place. He stared at it for a second or two and then crept closer to dump his armload of flowers into the hole.

"Careful, Teeza; the sand is soft..."

Too late...

Tinker set up a sand-slide. His arms flew out and he caught hold of Brandon by a fold of his trousers bottom and they went sliding down...splat... into the grave. Brandon, caught off-balance, tumbled down, with the disturbed soil avalanching in after them. Somehow

he managed to land head first. Their combined shrieks were almost immediately cut off.

Meanwhile Larry had gone to the bathroom and just as he flushed he heard a strange sound as of a scream or a dog's yelp. They had no dogs in the yard and they'd never had problems with strays. Shaking his head, he washed his hands, put out the light and went back to bed.

The Man who killed my brother!

By Eliza Mabungu

It is amazing how everyone talks about forgiveness but no one touches on apologising. I have to agree that my psyche is still backwards. I am still clinging on the past with a very vivid picture of the things that were in the present. I refused to believe my eyes when news about Nelson Mandela's release broke out. In my mind I thought that we are being played but the more I denied myself pleasure in celebrating freedom the more I felt repressed. Before I knew it, 1994 came and we had our new black President and it was now time to come back home. Exile offered a space for hibernation to take place but talks of reconciliation were just a myth to us. When fooled, unaware, you blame the perpetrators but now being fooled with your eyes wide open there's no need to blame anyone but you. Instead of rejoicing with them, we put our weapons down and decided to call off the guerrilla force and lie low. The force wasn't destroyed but called off and if there comes a need for us to strike, weapons will be raised and we will fight like no one has ever fought before. We shall await any provocation that will have us take force and fight for our people. Mandisa, my wife, blames the system on this kind of attitude and talks about how South Africa is a rainbow nation but I have seen an inseparable rainbow. The one that doesn't have its other members feel like they are not respected.

'Mandisa, please iron my creased shirt, please get me water', that annoying madam said as I went along with Mandisa after she had given her the washing machine and I had to drive to fetch it but I could smell the subordination in her tone. I couldn't believe that I had failed them, I was all in a rush. The memory of that day revives everything. It still makes my heart go at an imaginable speed, I begin to shake as I did and see it all. The scent of the wet grass from the night humidity always emerges at the center of my memory.

We were from work during the June 1976 march but we were caught into the crossfire of that event. The white policeman caught us while passing through as he stopped us and put us in his van. Mvelo was quiet calm for someone who always talked about his fear of the white man, and I, on the other side, prayed that my body

doesn't tremble enormously and my eyes not shine from tears of fear. I was completely shaking but no man has ever been taught to say how scared he is, doing so is like running naked in broad daylight in the street and have the kids laugh at you.

'Call me officer Van Tonder', the big bulk man said in a small squeaky voice that doesn't suit his body.

'Can I please see your pass'. Mvelo shot back, 'We are natives and isn't the color of our skin enough to tell you that we belong here more than you. So Meneer Van Tonder, how about you show me your pass!'.

It was so vigorous and stupid of him and Mr Van Tonder was very much offended by it. I gave him a reprimanding look but Mvelo was his own man. Once his mind was set on something there was no going back, no looking left or right. As we lay there on the grass, I touched his shoulder to calm him down but Mr Van Tonder provoked him.

'Jy het ñ hounding', he said in Afrikaans translated as *You have an attitude!* And continued, 'Luister hierso, jy is niks anders ñ swart aap', translated as: *He has just taken us back to the cradle of human kind and fiddled with a dead monkey's skeleton like those white scientists do and say that it is of relation to us knowing very well they have excluded themselves in the family tree.* Mvelo was aggravated and started swearing at the police officer in Zulu. He rose from the grass with a brick on his hand and kept hitting Van Tonder on his left eye. In response to the pain, Mr Van Tonder shot at him with an AK47 six times. He left me there with Mvelo's lifeless body as he drove off.

It was night and dark I don't know how long it took until they came for me. *Niyabasaba na? Haai asiba sabi siyabafuna!* They chanted about how they were not scared of the enemy and how ready they were to take them on.

'Call me Samora', one of them said, I couldn't see who he was in the dark but a part of me was glad that Samora and his sweaty comrades were with me. One of them held me as I stumbled on my feet to get up.

'Let's go comrade Bandile!' Shouted the voice of Samora.

They lifted me up as two held me but I cried for Mvelo, grabbing upon his corpse,

'Let the dead bury themselves! Matthew 8:22!'

A powerful man this Samora was as his troop agreed. He talked about how these settlers have used the Bible to destroy us but he has found a way for us to also use it against them. We left the wilderness with Mvelo placed on top of a tree so that whatever lives there may not feast on him and covered him with God-knows-what as we left for a more powerful movement. I had no time to lick my wounds, if it wasn't for Van Tonder's flashlights I wouldn't have his image in my head.

The next morning I had to see the mighty Samora who was not so good looking but judging by his talks one couldn't avoid the yearning to pick up on his brains. Samora was a natural born leader.

'Why am I here? I have to fight for my brother!', I murmured.

Samora looked at me with gloomy eyes and said, 'Fight for him with what ammunition? You see comrade you would have taken his route if we weren't there. Pain has never done no good, we need our own force to fight against that much bigger force'.

I kept murmuring but Samora wouldn't give up as he continued, 'You going at them alone is like a soldier going to war unprepared'.

'What about Mvelo?'

Jason one of the well dressed in the group said, 'We have called your family comrade and they have collected his body'. The force is driven by men with reasons to kill, men who seek vengeance. After a while getting to know the men I realised that many of them never wanted to get involved in the struggle but like me they were caught in the crossfire.

Samora told me his story and after that there was no looking back. 'My younger brother was involved with township gangsters who mixed crime and the struggle. One day he and his gang raided a whites-only restaurant forcing entry and when they were refused entry, they asked for the manager, who came. They killed the manager and ran off. The police were in search of him and tied my family up. They set them on fire and rode off, ashes were what was left for me to cling on and call family'. He just shut off after that, walking around the veranda with a cigarette in his hand. I guess that was his coping mechanism, he showed great strength. As much as I wished I could be him, my wounds were still fresh for such bravery. I wished I could pray and then train with them but the more I tried the less I

succeeded. As I got to know the troop, I learned that we were all connected by our similar yet different encounters.

‘Where am I?’ I asked after finding peace in my heart about Mvelo’s passing. In fact it was my mother who made me feel better, hearing her voice on the telephone just revived my spirit.

‘We are in Mozambique, and this is exile!’ Shouted Samora in his fighting spirit. We were shown how to hold our guns, bird sounds to communicate and fool the enemy and taught how to fire them. Samora was intelligent and once one of us missed home and talked about wanting to go back, he would retell your story to you. Watching you internally wishing to kick the hell out of him, he would say, ‘Now go back sir and be a white man’s boy, please!’ No one wanted to go back and be called Piet because your employer didn’t know how to pronounce your name but we dreamt of a new South Africa. We didn’t dream of the 1994 one but our new South Africa.

We were like soldiers with great combat skills, we knew how to camouflage ourselves and were ready for war but after we were toned down by the election of Mandela, we came back home. Life at home was very different from the time of my departure. Siyanda has now grown up and she shows no sign of grief about Mvelo’s death.

‘Baba, you are just clinging on nothing, I mean he died a long long time ago for me to miss him that much’. She is going to register at the University to study to be a Social worker. Mandisa told me about how the church contributed to her registration fee and the Priest is still raising funds from other branches of the church. On Sunday Mandisa and Siyanda persuade me to go to church with them and being touched by the act of kindness shown to my younger brother’s daughter I felt compelled to go. I figured that my presence would express my gratitude. We are all proud of Siyanda who lost her father when she was three months old. Her mother followed after that, failing to live with the pain of his death.

From the outside I could hear the congregation praying as hymns were sung. People made joyful sounds and I felt my heart yearning to be amongst them and anticipating our entrance. After singing the Priest ascended the podium and there he was.

‘A pleasant morning fellow brethren, I am Father Simon Howard and welcome you to the Chapel of victory!’ There he was, there was the man who killed my brother. Now why a sudden use of “Howard”,

this is *Meneer Van Tonder*. He changed his name for god knows what, but the eye is shut with many scars on it. 'Our word today is from the book of Ezekiel 16:6: *I passed by you and saw you kicking around helplessly in your blood. I said to you as you lay there in your blood, "Live!" I said to you as you lay there in your blood, "Live!"* Whatever was said after that I was so disturbed to hear. My ears were blocked by the beat of my heart. My head was burning and my feet sweating due to the replay of that night. As he kept preaching I tried to argue with myself that it can't be him but the more I inspected him, I could see that I was only fooling myself. He is such a very influential man, maybe it's in his nature to be in power. I can't help contemplating ways to attack this man but the more I do, the more I feel my tummy ache.

After the service I feel failed by my own body feeling all sorts of nausea as I rush home. Soon as I get home, the chicken skin disappears, how ironic! Did I really chickened out on facing the man who killed my younger brother? I find myself searching my bags for the numbers of my fellow comrades. I throw a tantrum when I can't get hold of them. Mandisa and Siyanda came back, looking at me with disappointed eyes.

'Here I am telling Father that my husband is with us and poof you disappear!' Siyanda is too angry to say a word as she makes tea for us. I am too quiet but Mandisa can't stop but complain, 'Well, I have invited him to dine with us tonight'. I hear something in me snap, in anger I lash out, 'No way in hell!'

The two of us argue to points. I can't even find a valid reason to replace the main one to stop the Priest from coming to my house.

Ten minutes before dinner, I go straight to bed. He comes in as they dine, 'Where is our struggle hero?' Mandisa excuses my actions as me feeling feverish and went straight to bed.

'I wish I could meet him, so that we can catch up on the good old days. It would be nice to talk to someone who experienced those days.' This four roomed house is too small for me to not hear everything they say. Mandisa blushing serves him dessert as he can't help thanking her. 'I remember when the police chased young men and they ran to the church. Those police guards were so cruel and...'

I come out of the room, cut into him, 'Stop lying Meneer Van Tonder, you are just going with the dessert, just because you're eating

something sweet you think you are sweet! I shout at the top of my lungs and I see Siyanda shaking her head in disappointment.

Mandisa rises and tries to calm me down.

‘Are you fine, Mr Mhlanga?’ He asks with great concern. I don’t think my wellness is any of his business but only his image matters. ‘There is nowhere to hide now! You thought that changing your name was going to erase the past?’ Mandisa blocks me and the two start acting like I am crazy. Mandisa tells him not to mind me. ‘Ignore him Father, he is dealing with the effects of the past’, they repeatedly say.

‘This man killed Mvelo! He is Meneer Van Tonder!’ He excuses himself as he walks away, looking at me with one eye. In my mind I thank Mvelo for giving him this horror eye. It’s a mark that he wanted me to remember him by.

‘How can you treat Father Howard like that? That man has been good to us!’ Shouts Mandisa. Siyanda just looks aside but I keep saying, ‘He killed Mvelo’, continuously like a lunatic.

Siyanda says, ‘You weren’t here when Father Howard helped mama take me to hospital when I was sick and you were in exile doing nothing. You are not a hero! Your name is not recorded in the history book!’ She wasn’t lying about my name not being in the history book but how many men who fought for this country are unknown?

‘Exile was a lazy move’, I tell Samora after remembering that his name is actually Moruti Moruti. Something I found out when we were getting ready to come back home, with our ups and downs, fixing our papers. He frowned, ‘Lazy name eh’, he said. It was truly a lazy name, like same surname and name. I then understood his preference for the alias of Samora.

‘I want us to raid his church and have me do to him what he did to my brother!’ Samora looks at me and sighs, he is too gangster compared to the snobbish petite man I knew. He gained a lot of weight and now has a pot belly. There is still a use of big English words but they are accompanied by *Tsotsi Taal*. *Tsotsi taal* is a blend of African languages together with some Afrikaans words.

‘Nie maan guluva, tlogela die ding e fete, e chende my brah!’ He said, telling me to let bygones be bygones. He talked about how he has more to live for, has found love and now is expecting his baby. Taking note of his old tactics I follow one of his route to remind him

of his past. He laughs and calls his lover to come, ‘Meisie come here, Jy hoer what this man is saying, funny how she thought I was lying’. I narrated it but not as he did in those days. Maybe Siyanda was right, we didn’t have anything to do but lazy around. I was only dragged into a group of expelled men and forgot that I had more to live for. The comrades had no means of coming back, they were banned but I was just afraid to come back and face reality.

Coming back home after no success in convincing Samora I apologise to the two and promise them that I will tag along with them to church and apologize to Father Howard. Maybe he is not the man who killed my brother, he just bears the same likeness and I should ignore this coincidence and be man up. I will work hard and support my wife and the only thing I have left in memory of my younger brother, which is, Siyanda. We make it early for the service. I apologise to the man of God and without any hostility he accepts my apology and asks for us to turn on a new leaf.

‘A friend of mine once told me that during the apartheid era, filled with hatred for the black man, he had pushed two brothers into his Police van and drove with them to somewhere across the border in the bushes of Mozambique. He said after a struggle with one of the brothers, he shot him and left the brother to die. The moral of my story dearly beloved is that the past is the past and should be left there. We are in new South Africa striving for peace with one another’, he said while standing at the podium.

‘Amen!’ Shouted Mandisa while nodding her head. But this man is confessing. Am I the only one who’s not blind?

I await the service to end, and today is the day I take him on.

‘Meneer Van Tonder’, I reach out my hand for a handshake. He brings it in and says, ‘Ya kaffir’. I knew that the sky is blue, had known this since I was from Sub A. The teacher had told me that the sky is always blue and yes it won’t change. Just like the sky is blue, a racist is a racist and won’t change. Father Howard goes to greet Siyanda and Mandisa but Siyanda walks off before he could start talking. Probably I am not the only one who sees that this man killed my younger brother. Why is Siyanda walking away?

When we get home Mandisa starts shouting at Siyanda, ‘That was disrespectful Siya! Did I teach you to be that rude?’ Mandisa keeps talking and I stop myself from quoting Mr Van Tonder. I allow her

some time to cool off but Siyanda just beats me to it, 'I want Father Howard to pay for killing Mvelo!' She shouts with swollen eyes, I guess she cried herself too much from the realisation of reality. There is deep silence in the room, after a couple of minutes or so, Mandisa goes to our room and puts on a jersey. She storms out of the house leaving the two of us to wonder where she is headed to.

'I don't think mom believes us, he is very close to her. He always helps us with financial problems'. I look at her with squinted eyes and she finally laughs.

'Where have you been Mandi?' She ignores me and goes straight to bed, leaving us to eat samp and beans on our own after going away for hours.

The next morning she rushes to work without me laying eyes on her. Siyanda and I go to the police station in attempts to lay charges against him but we are referred to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). At the TRC we are offered counselling as they take his contact details.

On a daily basis Mandisa leaves without saying goodbye and comes back when we are asleep but when she hears from her Father, she decides to wake us up at the crack of dawn murmuring and banging the cupboard doors.

'Huh mama! You sharp?' Mandisa looks at us and continues causing our heads to ache. 'Who reports an innocent man of God to the police? Who does that?!' I don't even feel guilty about that and can see from the rage-filled face that Siyanda also feels the same. Siyanda holds the emotional Mandisa's hand and sits her down. 'Mama, his story about his friend coincides with dad's'. Mandisa stood up from her chair and grabbed her bag and left. The TRC makes contact, letting us know that they have a meeting scheduled with Father Howard, the name they suggest I should start using in respect to him. I see no need to respect him but see much need for them to intervene so I follow the command. Siyanda and I can't help waiting for them to get back to us and tell us their final verdict. I don't want to let the wait kill me before I kill him. To ease the pain of anticipation in my head I go to the library to find out about this TRC. To my stupid surprise I kind of disgust myself for my ignorance in the "Reconciliation" in the organisation but I resiliently await a call from them. My understanding of it is kindly brought to light

when the lady from the commission calls and tells me that Father Howard denies ever being the man who killed my brother.

Despite Mandisa ever being distanced from us, Siyanda and I defiantly join forces to expose my brother's killer. Seeing that the TRC has nothing to offer us we investigate the existence of Father Howard.

'Baba, we just need a picture of this Meneer Van Tonder and compare it to Father Howard!' Exclaims the excited smart Siyanda. To come to think of it, she actually is right if I am right about this Father being that killer. After long hours of searching in the Library archives we stumble upon an article about Juan Van Tonder being a patriotic saint of the apartheid regime. My heart stands in a halt, attempting to gasp for air, I choke myself but the thought of seeing that I was correct about the man who killed my brother keeps me intact. It allowed me to dream again, dreaming of Mvelo's spirit being at peace and have my family move on.

'How we approach this should be of our great concerns', Siyanda says with discomfort in her voice. I think this is weighing her up more than me. As soon as we get home we cook up a plan on how to bring down the man. Our plans come to a halt when Mandisa enters the room lamenting. She cries, 'Such a great man, the heavens must be rejoicing to receive such a great soul but we are in pain to have lost it'. Immediately when she announces the death of Meneer Van Tonder I call off our witch hunt as we watch Mandisa wail. I am torn between comforting my wife and celebrating the death of the man who killed my brother but no matter how great the urge to celebrate his death is to me I can't shake the feeling that justice is not served.

I couldn't deal with him being gone, I had to leave. As I get to his office I find him hanging there lifelessly and I call the men working on the church's garden to help me untie him. 'A great man he was', they all say leaving me with his body as they leave to call the local mortuary. Left alone with the defenseless and weak body I can't resist the urge of wanting to slap it. I finally satisfy my temptation to no avail of it ever filling up the gap that's in my heart. It can never bring him back to admit what he did to him. But I give in, slapping him six times hoping to make up for the six bullets Mvelo suffered. It all makes sense now that actually Mvelo's death was not haunting me but I couldn't bring myself to terms with not being there for him

when he needed me most. I could have been there for Siyanda to groom her to be a success but I followed a path of no success. Maybe the part I missed is not an apology from Meneer van Tonder but an apology from me to me.

Taxi Directo

By Ludwing Varela

Al salir de la casa que visitamos aquella noche, parecía que éramos las únicas almas que en ese momento vivían en la ciudad. Esperamos entre 10 y 15 minutos para ver como una pequeña luz que se dejaba ver a lo lejos se acercaba, y que poco a poco tomaba fuerza hasta llegar a alumbrarnos por completo. El taxi se acomodó frente a nosotros y le hice la pregunta de ley:

-Buenas noches ¿por cuánto nos lleva a Bella Oriente?

-Bella Oriente... Bella Oriente...

Y en su cabeza, a una velocidad que triplicaba la velocidad que alcanzaba la aceleración de su carro, comenzó la ecuación de tiempo y distancia para llegar a la conclusión de cuánto gastaría de combustible y así decirme de golpe cuál sería el precio.

-Bella Oriente... lo llevo por L.100

Pensé en mi presupuesto, si le daba los cien no tendría lo suficiente para tomar el colectivo que me llevaría al banco al siguiente día para ver si ya habían depositado de mi trabajo.

-Lléveme por 70, si toma el anillo no gastará mucho combustible.

-Está lejos- Dijo el viejo, como quien hace alusión a un recuerdo de la infancia.

-No tanto, claro, si toma el anillo periférico –Insistí.

El conductor hizo de nuevo sus cálculos, esta vez a una mayor velocidad que la anterior, tal vez esta vez no hizo los cálculos con la mente, sino con el corazón.

-Móntense-. Repuso de inmediato.

Nos subimos al auto y comenzamos a ver la ciudad con la costumbre de quien mira una parte de su cuerpo. Las calles, las luces, los edificios, los rótulos, la basura, los perros... la ciudad que habitábamos y que a la vez nos habitaba, una ciudad que metafóricamente podría simbolizarse como una perra gigante que día a día se sacudía las pulgas de sus ciudadanos. Pero era extraño, eso sí, que no miráramos a ningún borracho platicando con alguna prostituta en alguna esquina del edificio rojo, que las tiendas de licor por las que pasábamos permanecieran cerradas. Se sentía una quietud que asustaba, porque si después de la tormenta viene la calma, ¿Qué vendrá luego de la tranquilidad? Salíamos de la 21 de Octubre para

tomar el anillo, llevábamos uno o dos kilómetros cuando el motor del carro desfalleció y de pronto la velocidad iba disminuyendo a cada vuelta de rueda. Esto se veía muy mal, estábamos cerca de una colonia que tenía fama de ser peligrosa, y quedarte tirado allí, cuando estas junto a tu mujer y tu hijo de 2 años, y también junto a tu suegra, y un taxista de más de 60 años, las cosas realmente no podrían tener una peor cara. Pero no dije nada, pues podría ser que un borne de la batería se hubiera aflojado y todo se resolvería en menos de un minuto. El viejo se bajó, y tiró la puerta como quien no quiere la cosa. Miré a mi mujer de reojo, pero ella estaba entretenida con la música de sus audífonos y con sus ojos cerrados, tarareaba suavemente una canción que yo no conocía, mi hijo dormía en los brazos de mi suegra y mi suegra le acompañaba con unos leves ronquidos. Casi eran las dos de la madrugada, era lógico que el sueño les venciera, pero viéndolo bien, era lo mejor que podía pasar para así evitarles el susto de permanecer estancados en un lugar tan peligroso. El viejo regresó he intentó darle al encendido pero nada. Pasaron 10 minutos, antes, ya habían pasado más de 5 minutos, así que abrí la puerta y me acerqué al viejo que con foco en mano, apuntaba a un lado y a otro del motor, mientras yo pensaba en lo mucho que odiaba la mecánica, lo mucho que murmuraba cuando mi padre, quien creía que sabía todo sobre los motores de sus autos, me hacía permanecer casi a la fuerza, para ver cómo, según él, resolvía los problemas mecánicos que casi nunca supo resolver.

-¿Cuál podría ser el problema? -Le pregunté.

-No tengo la menor idea.

Un hombre sin ideas no es un hombre, me dije. Así que si él no sabía qué hacer, yo si tenía en mente que hacer.

-Llamaré a un radio taxi señor.

Sabía que el radio taxi me cobraría no menos de cien, pero era eso, o arriesgar la vida de mi familia.

-No joven, no hable.

-No puedo quedarme aquí señor. Si estuviera solo otro gallo cantara. Pero mi mujer, mi hijo, mi suegra. Ni siquiera debo pensarlo.

El viejo se levantó la camisa y sacó de su cintura un revolver calibre 38 que sobre sus manos se miraba con un brillo inquietante, con una fuerza difícil de explicar.

-Señor, llamaré al taxi, a usted no le inquieta quedarse ya que está bien armado. Así ni los fantasmas se le acercarán.

-Si te digo que no hables no es un consejo, es una orden. Ni vos ni nadie se va a mover de aquí. Metete al carro y no digas nada. No sos el primer pasajero que por necio se mete en problemas. Comencé a sudar. Realmente el viejo lo decía con toda la sinceridad que un hombre puede tener al decir algo. Pero no podía dejar que él me viera nervioso, ya que si notaba mis nervios queriendo salir como espinas por cada uno de mis poros, entonces ni siquiera me dejaría hablar.

-Tiene razón. Lo mejor es esperar aquí. Pero a lo menos déjeme ayudarlo a revisar, mi padre es mecánico y he aprendido algunas cosas.

¡Había metido la lengua! No sé porque cuando alguien dice algo que no debía decir, siempre dicen “metiste la pata”. Había metido la lengua y ahora tenía que llenarla del aceite que tanto había odiado.

-¿Y por qué carajos no te bajaste a ayudarme desde que el carro se apagó? Y yo como pendejo revisando por aquí y por allá, revisando mierdas que ni conozco, esperando a que te salieras de tu comodidad y me preguntaras en qué podías ser bueno. Pero no creo que seas bueno para ni mierda. Si no desde que me bajé te hubieras bajado conmigo para ayudarme.

-Señor, últimamente he trabajado mucho y el cansancio me doblega, y realmente pensé que era algo de la batería y que se arreglaría socando alguno de los bornes.

-Arregla este carro y vámonos, si no nadie se moverá de aquí.

Me metí bajo el carro sin saber ni cómo ni en qué momento se me había ocurrido la semejante idea de mentir de esa manera. La idiotez se desprendía de mi aliento, me sentía el hombre más idiota sobre la faz de la tierra. Era imposible que yo pudiera reparar ese carro, pero lo que si era posible, era que el viejo al descubrirme se sintiera engañado y descargara su 38 en mi pecho, y luego tendría que ver como hacía con mi familia ya que habrían sido testigos. El miedo es una puerta por donde pasan las más valerosas ideas. El miedo era la llave para prender el motor de mis impulsos y mis razonamientos y así salir del hoyo en el que estaba metido. ¿Qué culpa tenía mi familia que yo no supiera ni cambiar una llanta? Pero ese “déjeme ayudarlo a revisar, mi padre es mecánico y he aprendido cosas” me

hundía como el iceberg al titanic. Pero un sonido agudo me sacó de mi pensamiento.

-¿pero qué acaba de hacer señor? Pregunté saliendo de pronto.

-Siempre he odiado a los perros. Me dijo el viejo con su arma apuntando el cadáver del animal que estaba a unos cuantos metros. - Los perros son como los hombres, hay quienes dicen que son tus mejores amigos, y algunos terminan morditiéndote la mano.-

Y lo decía con saña, ya ese amable viejo que se había estacionado para regatear conmigo se había ido. Lo que estaba frente a mí era un hombre con todas las ganas de liquidar al mundo. Un hombre que sabía que su gatillo era la llave que abría la puerta a un mundo que todos tenían miedo de conocer. Un hombre moldeado por el mismo mundo, que había sembrado en él una paranoia tan grande que lo había convertido en un asesino silencioso. Por suerte mi mujer se había quedado dormida con los audífonos puestos, y la profundidad del sueño de mi hijo y de mi suegra no permitió que escucharan ese frío sonido. Pero las cosas se aclaraban cada vez más, tenía que irme de ese lugar, y no precisamente llamando a un radio taxi. Tenía que irme lo antes posible. Respiré profundo, le dije al viejo que ocupaba herramientas. Pero lo dije con tanta seguridad que ni siquiera dudó. Tomó la llave del baúl he intentó abrirlo, pero al parecer la puerta estaba atascada, así que mientras el viejo paranoico se colocaba de nuevo su arma en la cintura, yo buscaba a mi alrededor la llave de mi salida, y como quien ve un oasis en un desierto, estaba a menos de dos pasos de mí una piedra que perfectamente podía llegar a pesar una libra, la tomé mientras el viejo forcejeaba, y con la naturaleza de alguien que desea sobrevivir, le di tan fuerte en su cabeza, que escuché como tronaron sus huesos al quebrarse. Y le di y le di, aprovechando que su cabeza estaba apoyada sobre el baúl. Pero el grito de mi mujer me sacó de mi oscura excitación

-¿Qué haces, por Dios? ¿Qué carajos haces?

La respuesta era sencilla. Podía simplemente haberle dicho. “Estoy matando a un hombre. Mira lo fácil que es” Pero eran tantas las palabras que querían salir que parecía que se habían atorado en mi garganta. Así que solté la piedra y respiré profundo para que las palabras salieran en orden.

-¡Este viejo de mierda nos quería matar y tenía que hacer algo! Si no me crees revísale la cintura, está armado. Te juro que te estoy diciendo la verdad.

Reaccionó como se reacciona ante un suceso de tan grande magnitud. Primero enterró sus manos en su cabello, los jaló un poco, mientras absorbía en sus pequeños pulmones todo el aire que estaba a su alrededor e intentó dar un paso para un lado, pero de pronto lo daba para otro y así sucesivamente sin poder moverse a ningún lado. Entonces me acerqué al cuerpo del viejo, levanté su camisa y ella pudo ver el arma. Entonces me dijo lo que yo suponía que tenía que haberme dicho desde un principio

-¿Qué haremos?

-Vamos a irnos. Tu mamá no se ha dado cuenta ni tiene que darse cuenta de esto. La despertás, y le decís que camine y de tanto sueño ni siquiera preguntará nada, sino hasta que esté bien despierta y para eso ya no vamos a estar aquí.

Así que yo tomé al niño entre mis brazos, ella despertó a su madre quien como una sonámbula siguió los pasos de su hija. Mi corazón estaba agitado, palpitaba con la fuerza de una bomba que bien podía destruir el corazón de todos los hombres que caminaran por este terrible y oscuro mundo, pero a cada paso que me alejaba de ese lugar, el corazón iba retomando su ritmo natural y cuando ya habíamos tomado tanta distancia como para no poder distinguir el carro que hace unos minutos habíamos abandonado, vimos a lo lejos una pequeña luz que poco a poco tomaba fuerza hasta llegar a alumbrarnos por completo. Era otro taxi, se acomodó frente a nosotros y le hice la pregunta de ley:

-Buenas noches ¿por cuánto nos lleva a Bella Oriente?

La Loba, La Flor Y El Pájaro

By Sóira Celestino

En el Reino de fantasía eran las hadas las que daban forma a los bebés antes de nacer. Así, cuando nació la princesa el hada de la noche le dio un cabello hermoso y negro, tan oscuro como una noche sin luna. Las hadas de invierno decidieron dar a su piel la blancura de la nieve. El hada de las flores pintó los labios con el color rojo, que transformaban su piel, suave y fragante como las flores. El hada de los pájaros le dio una voz como el canto de un ruiseñor y la fuerza y el coraje del águila. Los ojos verdes eran dos esmeraldas otorgadas por las hadas de piedras preciosas, que además le dieron dientes hechos de cristal puro. Las hadas de las palabras le dieron una cucharada de miel para endulzar su discurso. El señor de las hadas le dio el aliento de vida, un corazón amoroso, la sabiduría oculta, el encanto y sensibilidad a la belleza de la vida.

En el bosque del Reino, en una pequeña casa de piedra, vivía un viejo soldado con su joven esposa. Durante muchos años, sirvió con lealtad al rey. Pero con el paso del tiempo y después de muchas heridas de batalla, el hombre decidió buscar la paz en su casa. Su corazón estaba contento porque sería padre. Y al mismo tiempo que la princesa, las hadas también hicieron el bebé del valiente guerrero.

El niño recibió el mismo pelo negro, piel blanca y ojos verdes. El hada de los animales le dio la astucia del lobo, el orgullo y la valentía del león, la elegancia y la velocidad del caballo. El hada de las tormentas le dio una voz de trueno y el hada de las estrellas, la energía y luz del sol. El señor de las hadas le dio el aliento de la vida, un corazón valiente, el amor por la poesía y la naturaleza y entre los dos bebés, el sentimiento del amor.

Por lo tanto, los bebés fueron entregados a la alegría de sus familias para volver a unirse pasados los años.

Y los años pasaron...

El niño se ha convertido en un guerrero fuerte y hermoso, habiendo aprendido de su padre, todas las técnicas de lucha y de caza.

Todas las tardes, cuando el sol empezaba a ocultarse, el chico subía al lugar más alto del bosque y no dejaba de mirar hacia el castillo, con la sensación de que la mitad de su corazón estaba allí.

En uno de esos momentos, una bella loba blanca se le acercó, mansa como un perrito, tocando con su bozal en las piernas. Él se inclinó y amorosamente hizo una caricia al animal y lo llevó a su casa. De lo que el joven no se dio cuenta es de qué se trataba de su fiel compañera el hada de los animales.

Cada vez que salía a cazar al bosque, ella lo miraba escondida entre los árboles por lo que terminó enamorándose de él.

El mago y señor de los muertos amaba al hada de los animales. Un día fue a visitarla y la vio mirando al chico apasionadamente. El odio se le subió a la cabeza al ver que su amor no iba ser correspondido. En su maldad, planeó una trampa para destruir a su rival y lograr llevársela al reino de las tinieblas.

- ¡Hola mi amada! - le saludó tratando de ocultar su odio.

- ¡Qué susto! ¿Qué estás haciendo aquí? - preguntó el hada con la sensación de estar siendo amenazada por la presencia del maligno ser.

- ¡He venido sólo a visitarte, mi hada divina! ¡Traigo un regalo! – respondió mientras extendía la mano arrugada sosteniendo un collar de huesos con un colgante de un pequeño cráneo.

El hada se horrorizó al visualizar la fealdad del collar en su cuello. La misma sensación que experimenta al mirar el mago con el pelo largo de color púrpura, la piel gris-verdosa y los ojos completamente blancos. El mago avanzó hacia ella para poner el collar arriba de su vestido de piel de animal. Él apestaba a carne podrida.

- ¡Te ves más hermosa que nunca! Esto va a impresionar al joven que amas. - Continúo el mago mirándola con malicia.

- No sé de que hablas. - Ella contestó con miedo.

- No te preocupes. Este será nuestro secreto. No voy a decirle nada a tu padre ni a tus hermanas. Nadie más sabrá del amor que sientes por este hombre. Y para demostrar que quiero tu felicidad te daré una idea. ¿Porque no te conviertes en un hermoso animal para hacerle compañía a tu joven amor?

Siguiendo el consejo del señor de los muertos y con el fin de estar cerca de su amor y no ser descubierta por las otras hadas, se convirtió en una hermosa loba blanca. Así podría estar cerca de su amado, protegiéndolo y recibiendo su afecto.

La princesa se convirtió en una joven bonita, agradable, amable y de buen corazón. En una mañana soleada, mientras paseaba por el jardín, ella percibió un olor a carne podrida y al mirar de dónde venía, vio a un hombre encapuchado en un rincón que dijo:

-Hermosa! Todos los elogios para su belleza no son suficientes. ¡Las hadas le han dotado de preciosos dones! ¿El corazón de la joven alberga un amor así de bello?

Con su sonrisa de cristal, la princesa iluminó el jardín, obligando al forastero ocultarse aún más en el rincón:

- Todas las tardes, desde la ventana de mi habitación, miró a lo lejos, el bosque. No sé por qué mi corazón late más rápido y se llena de amor.

-Yo conozco la razón, ¡Oh hermosa princesa! Es su amor. Un guerrero valiente y hermoso. Sus destinos están unidos por el Señor de las Hadas. - Una vez dicho esto, el misterioso ser desapareció.

La curiosidad de la princesa la llevó hacia el bosque.

El corazón de la princesa latía tan deprisa y tan fuerte como el trote del caballo negro que rápidamente cruzaba el reino. Ansiaba llegar al bosque y descubrir el misterio que llenaba su alma con amor.

El joven guerrero estaba en su lugar habitual, mirando hacia el castillo, cuando vio a la bella princesa cabalgando hacia la entrada del bosque. La emoción por su presencia fue tan fuerte que las piernas se le debilitaron. El corazón casi le saltó de su boca. A medida que sus ojos la siguieron, la loba correteó para encontrarla. Ella sabía que no podía dejar que se encontraran porque de lo contrario moriría por su amor.

La princesa descendió de su caballo, entró en el bosque y fue inmediatamente atacada por la loba feroz. El hada de las flores había

ido a visitar a su hermana y se encontró a la princesa herida, casi muerta, mientras el corcel negro trató de defenderla.

El hada de las flores colocó un polvo mágico sobre la princesa para llevarla al jardín del castillo antes de que la loba la pudiera ver.

El joven guerrero llegó a la escena y lanzó un certero flechazo en el corazón de la loba, quien delante de sus ojos asustados, se transformó de nuevo en el hada de los animales. El corcel estaba casi muriéndose. Por clemencia, el chico le encajó una flecha también. Sus ojos estaban llenos de lágrimas. Se vio obligado a matar a la loba, su compañera de muchos momentos... De su bella dama, sólo quedaba el vestido de tejido fino teñido con sangre.

El hada de las flores encontró al niño llorando, abrazándose al vestido y con la cabeza del hada de los animales en su regazo. Cuando la vio, preguntó:

- ¡Oh hermosa hada! ¿Qué pasó con la chica que como tú, tiene belleza, delicadeza, encantamiento? ¿Porque a mí me ocurrió tal desgracia? Echo de menos a mi fiel compañera y aquel a quien mi corazón sintió a primera vista, el amor. .

El hada, entristecida, le dijo:

- He intentado de todas las formas regresar a la princesa a la vida. Pero ella se mantuvo sin vida. Volver a hablar con mi hermana y tratar de salvarla. ¡Oh, qué dolor! Mi hermana, el hada de los animales, muerta! Y la princesa jamás podrá volver a la vida!

El hada de los pájaros pidió que un ruiseñor llevase la triste historia al Señor de las hadas, contando toda la tragedia. Al oírlo, dejó su trono y se fue al bosque.

- ¡Qué trágica historia de amor! - exclamó el Señor de las Hadas, mirando al joven guerrero que en silencio lloraba.

- ¡Señor de las hadas! ¡Sácame de este mundo! ¡Cuántas tragedias me han golpeado! ¡Yo maté a la fiel compañera que mató mi amor! - suplicó el joven guerrero.

- ¡Misteriosos eventos tan contrarios al destino! ¿Cómo te imaginas que una de mis hijas me traicionaría así? ¡Disfrazada como una loba para acercarse a este joven! ¿Dónde está la princesa? - Preguntó con voz de trueno que hizo temblar la tierra mientras que tomó la hija muerta en sus brazos. Sus ojos se asustaron con el collar colgando del cuello.

- Señor, he intentado curar sus heridas. Restaurar su vida. Pero no pasó nada. La convertí en una flor protegida por espinas fuertes y venenosas. Nadie puede acercarse a ella. Vine en busca de ayuda del hada de los animales para darle vida. ¿Pero muerta? No hay posibilidades para que la princesa viva su amor con el joven guerrero. - contestó el hada de las flores.

- Hay esperanza. Si el guerrero así lo decide. - respondió el hada de los pájaros.

- Haré lo que sea para revivir mi amor. -respondió el joven.

- Hay sólo una manera de acercarse a la princesa. Te puedo convertir en un pájaro pequeño y ligero, con vuelo muy rápido y el pico largo. Así que usted puede besar a su amada y siempre estar cerca de ella. ¿De acuerdo, Señor de las hadas?

- Tienes mi aprobación. Que así sea. Joven, aunque no quieras, este será tu destino. Aunque sea para defender a la princesa, mató a una de mis hijas, se golpeó con una flecha clavada en su corazón. - contestó el Señor de las hadas.

Así que el joven se convirtió en un pájaro y se fue besando todas las flores hasta encontrar a la princesa.

El señor de los muertos logro éxito porque el hada de los animales cayó en su trampa siguiendo sus consejos. Él la trajo de vuelta a la vida, para estar a su lado en el mundo de las tinieblas. Pero cuando las noches están más iluminadas debido a la luna llena, el hada de los animales vuelve al bosque, en forma de loba, a buscar a su guerrero. Como nunca lo encuentra, se levanta en el lugar más alto donde siempre se reunía con él y, mirando hacia el castillo, llora a través de sus aullidos.

The Wolf, The Flower And The Bird

By Sóira Celestino

In the Kingdom of fantasy fairies were the ones who gave babies form before birth. That's when the princess was born.

The Night Fairy gave her a beautiful black hair, dark as a moonless night. Winter Fairies decided to give her skin the whiteness of the snow. The Flower Fairy painted her lips with red color and turned her skin soft and fragrant as flowers. The Fairy Birds gave her a voice like the song of a nightingale and the strength and courage of an eagle. Her green eyes were like two emeralds given by the fairies of precious stones, and still had teeth made of pure crystal. Fairy Words gave her a spoonful of honey to sweeten her speech. The Lord of the fairies gave the breath of life, a loving heart, the hidden wisdom, charm and sensitivity to the beauty of life.

In the forest of the Kingdom, in a small stone house, an old soldier lived with his young wife.

For many years, he served with loyalty to the king. But with the passage of time and after many battle wounds, the man decided to seek peace at home. His heart was happy because he would be a father. And when the princess was born, fairies also made the baby of the brave warrior born.

The child received the same black hair, white skin and green eyes. The fairy of the animals gave him cunning of wolves, pride and courage of the lion, the elegance and the speed of the horse. The Storm Fairy gave him a thunderous voice and the fairy of stars, energy and sunlight. The Lord of the fairies gave him the breath of life, a brave heart, and love for poetry and nature and between the two babies, a union was made with the feeling of love. Therefore, the babies were delivered to the joy of their families, to join again after years have passed by.

And the years passed...

The child has become a strong and beautiful warrior, having learned from his father, all fighting techniques and hunting.

Every afternoon, when the sun began to set, the boy climbed to the highest point in the woods and kept looking at the castle, with the feeling that half of his heart was there.

In one of those moments, a beautiful white wolf approached him, gentle as a puppy, touching his legs with the muzzle. He leaned over and lovingly made a caress to the animal and took him home. What the young man did not realize is that his faithful companion was the fairy of animals.

Every time he goes out hunting in the woods, she looked at him hidden among the trees and ended up falling in love.

The Magician and Lord of the Dead loved the fairy of animals. One day she went out to visit her and saw her looking at the boy passionately. Hatred went to his head when he realized his love would not be reciprocated. In his wickedness, he planned a trap to get her in his kingdom of darkness and gloom and destroy his rival.

“Hello my dear!” He greeted her, trying to hide his hate.

“What a shock! What are you doing here?” Asked the fairy with the feeling of being threatened by the presence of a malignant being.

“I have come only to visit you, my divine fairy! I Brought a Gift!” He responded by extending his wrinkled hand holding a necklace of bones with a pendant of a small skull.

The fairy was horrified with the ugliness of the collar around his neck. The same surprise she had when she looked at the wizard with his long purple hair, gray-green skin and completely white eyes, which moved toward her with his dress of animal skin to put up her the collar. He stinks of rotting flesh.

“You look more beautiful than ever! This will impress the man you love.” The Wizard continued staring at her wickedly.

“I do not know what you’re saying.” She replied with fear.

“Do not worry. This will be our secret. I will not say anything to your father or sisters. No one will know about your love for this man. And to prove that I want your happiness I will give you an idea. Why don’t you become a beautiful animal to make company of your young love?”

Following the advice of the lord of the dead, in order to be near her love and not be discovered by other fairies, she became a beautiful white wolf. So she could be near her beloved, protecting him and receiving his affection.

The princess became a nice, pleasant, friendly and kind-hearted young girl. On a sunny morning, while strolling through the garden, she felt a smell of rotting flesh and she saw a hooded man in a corner, he said:

“Beautiful! All praise you get for your beauty is not enough. The fairies gave you precious gifts! Does your heart have such a beautiful love?”

With her smile glass the prince lit the garden, forcing the stranger to hide even more deep in the corner:

“Every evening, from the window of my room, I look away to the forest. I do not know why my heart beats faster and is full of love.

“I know the reason, Oh beautiful princess! It is his love. A brave and beautiful warrior. Their fates are bound together by the Lord of the Fairies.” Having said this, the mysterious being disappeared.

The princess curiosity took her to the forest.

Princess heart was beating as fast and strong as the black horse trotting quickly crossing the kingdom. She was dying to reach the forest and discover the mystery that filled her soul with love.

The young warrior was in his usual place, looking at the castle when he saw the beautiful princess riding off into the forest entrance. The excitement of her presence was so strong that his legs were weak. The heart almost jumped out of his mouth. As his eyes followed her the wolf scurried to find her. She knew she could not let them get together because otherwise she would die for losing her love.

The princess alighted from her horse, went into the woods and was immediately attacked by the ferocious wolf. The flower fairy had gone to visit her sister and found the princess wounded, almost dead, while the black steed tried to defend her.

The flower fairy smeared a magic dust on the Princess to take her to the castle garden before the wolf could see.

The young warrior arrived on the scene and shot an accurate arrow in the heart of the she-wolf, whom before their frightened eyes, turned back into the fairy of animals. The steed was almost dying. For clemency, the boy slammed an arrow too. His eyes were filled with tears. He was forced to kill the wolf, his companion of many moments ... Of his beautiful lady, the only thing left was the dress stained with blood tissue.

The flower fairy found the child crying, hugging the dress and with the head of the fairy on his lap. When he saw her, he asked:

“Oh beautiful fairy! What happened to the girl who, like you, has beauty, delicacy, enchantment? Why this misfortune happened to me? I miss my faithful companion and the one whom makes my heart feels good at first sight, love.”

The fairy, sadly said:

“I tried all ways to bring the princess to life. But she remained weak. I went to talk to my sister and tried to save her. Oh, what a pain! My sister, the fairy of animals, is dead! And the princess can never come back to life!”

The fairy bird called a nightingale to carry the sad story to the Lord of the fairies, telling of the whole tragedy. Hearing this, he left his throne and went into the woods.

“What a tragic love story!” Cried the Lord of the fairies, looking at the young warrior who quietly wept.

“Lord of the fairies! Get me out of this world! How many tragedies have hit me! I killed my faithful companion who killed my love!” Begged the young warrior.

“Mysterious events opposed to destiny! How do you imagine that one of my daughters betrayed me like that! Disguised as a wolf to approach this young man! Where is the princess?” He asked with a voice of thunder that shook the ground whilst he took the dead girl in his arms. His eyes were frightened by the necklace of the Fairy of Animals.

“Lord, I have tried to heal her wounds. Restore her life. But nothing happened. I turned her into a protected flower with strong and poisonous spines. No one could approach her. I came to ask for help from the fairy of animals to revive her...But dead? There is no

possibility for the princess to live her love with the young warrior.” Answered the Fairy of Flowers.

“There is hope if the warrior accepts.” Replied the fairy of birds.

“I’ll do whatever it takes to re-live my love.” Replied the young man.

“There is only one way to approach the princess. I can turn you into a small, lightweight bird with very fast flight and long beak. So you can kiss your beloved and always be near her.”

“Okay”, Lord of Fairies?

“You have my approval. So be it. Young warrior, even if it’s against your will, this will be your fate. Even if it is to defend the princess, you killed one of my daughters, hit with an arrow in her heart.” Answered the Lord of fairies.

So the young man became a bird and went kissing all the flowers until he found the princess.

The lord of the dead achieved success because the fairy of the animals fell into their trap following his advice. He brought her back to life, to be at his side in the world of darkness. But when the nights are brighter because of the full moon, the fairy of the animals goes back to the forest, as she-wolf, to look for her warrior. As she never finds him, she stands on the highest place where he always stayed with her, looking into the castle, crying through her howls.

Conferencia de Hocquetot en la Universidad Desconocida

By Gustavo Campos

Al finalizar su ponencia magistral, abren el micrófono al auditorio. Una escuálida y bajita edecán, vestida de hippie setentera, lleva el micrófono inalámbrico a la primera persona que levantó la mano. Un agudo *feedback* sabotea de entrada el conversatorio y hace evidente el malestar de los organizadores, cuya mirada recriminatoria recae sobre el encargado del sonido.

Comienza la ronda de preguntas:

– ¿Hocquetot, y usted qué opina de la economía del lenguaje?

– En tiempos de crisis, es importantísima.

– ¿Y sobre las descripciones en la narrativa?

– Si me describen a mí, son válidas.

– He oído que sus libros son muy complejos. ¿Ha pensado alguna vez en escribir de manera más sencilla para aumentar el número de sus lectores?

– ¿Acaso ha pensado usted alguna vez hacerse más bonita para tener más amantes?

– ¿Es cierto que usted dejó de escribir durante un tiempo porque le robaron lo que usted consideraba su gran acierto literario?

– Es cierto. Aunque la verdad es que dejé de escribir porque tenía que comer. Cuando como, no puedo escribir.

– ¿Qué ha sido de su libro perdido, tiene esperanza de hallarlo?

– No. ¿Usted sí?

– Escribiré sobre su libro perdido como Shakira escribió su álbum perdido “¿Dónde están los ladrones?”

– Aún no lo he pensado. Pero sí le diré que hace unos meses me entrevistó la revista turca *Blue Jean* sobre el desastre de grandes

magnitudes que le ocurrió a la literatura. Todavía hablan de pérdidas inimaginables, pues ellos creen, no yo, que en ese libro se encontraban las claves para entender esta nueva era de la humanidad. Respecto a Shakira, me gustan sus dos primeros álbumes y cuando su pelo era negro y tenía un aura virginal como una madonna del siglo XVI...

—Hace un tiempo, a causa de las críticas devastadoras que recibió sobre su identidad, usted cambió su nombre artístico a su nombre de pila y viceversa ¿Qué nos puede decir al respecto?

—Eso es una injuria. Jamás cambiaría mi nombre por críticas insanas y malintencionadas de tan honorables hombres de las letras. La verdadera razón se debió a que era la única forma de esconderme de los acreedores. Como usted sabrá, el índice de lectura por persona en los países latinoamericanos es de entre dos a cinco libros por año y en este país es de medio libro. Hice un mal cálculo. El tiraje de ejemplares lo basé en un dato erróneo y ahora me toca pagar el préstamo por los libros que se pudren en mi casa. Y antes que pregunten, no, tampoco fui informante de la CIA como algunos aseguraron. A los pobres poetas Antonio José Rivas y Roque Dalton también les achacaron lo mismo.

—¿Se considera marxista?

—Pues fíjese que del único marxista que he oído hablar es de Marx. Y ni tan marxista, pues este se burlaba en cartas a Engels de los artistas comprometidos que elaboraban literatura política, en cambio, disfrutaba y admiraba a Balzac.

—¿Me gustaría preguntarle si es otro más de esos escritores mercadotécnicos que solo escriben de noche....?

—No, soy de esos que escriben de día y de noche, pero nunca bajo la lluvia, ese clima sí lo respeto.

—¿Es cierto que usted odia entrar a librerías y que en su lugar prefiere los supermercados y las tiendas de electrodomésticos?

—Ciertísimo.

—Sr. Hocquetot, a mí déjeme decirle que me enferman los que solo citan a europeos... como si no hubiera ni un escritor hondureño de verse...

—De verse no lo sé, de ver quizás; que leer, sí, los hay, por allí tiene a Roberto Castillo, me refiero a su último libro o etapa, o a José Antonio Funes, por nombrarle dos nomás.

—Entre leer y escribir, ¿qué prefiere?

—Cocinar...

—¿Le gusta la música clásica?

—Yo profiero la ensalada a Beethoven y Sinatra, a Vivaldi, uvas pasas que me dan más calorías...

—¿Es feliz?

—Upa. Epa. Ipa.

—¿Usted es sopla nucas o muerde almohadas...?

—No entiendo su pregunta.

—Usted busca respuestas, ¿cómo cuáles?

—Eh..., como a qué horas termina este interrogatorio.

—Querido señor Hocquetot, ¿extrañas a la mujer que te marcó?
¿O solo fue un invento?

—Sí, la muy ingrata no me dejó ni borrador ni corrector.

—¡No se puede hablar con usted, todo se lo toma en juego!

—No es mi culpa que usted todo se lo tome en serio.

—¿Cuál fue el final de su experimento Priestley? ¿Era ficción o realidad?

—Por supuesto que era solo un cuento, por Dios, ¿de qué me cree capaz usted? ¿De sacrificar personas? Pero confieso aquí, ante ustedes, que sí mandé a construir las tres campanas de cristal de 2 metros de altura por 1 metro de anchura. Y también es cierto que convoqué a los jóvenes que no gustan de la lectura para realizar el experimento. Créame que estaban muy interesados en desmitificar

ese mito de que los libros son importantes en la vida del ser humano como el oxígeno. Sustituí las plantas por libros, por grandes y venerables obras maestras, y dejé entrar a uno de los convocados. Mis experimentos con ratas ya habían arrojado evidencia que no fue refutada por mis experimentos con personas.

—¿Ha pensado dar clases en universidades?

—Válgame Dios que no; cuídeme de tal sacrilegio; aún me tengo estima, aunque el reconocimiento no me tenga en su gloria.

—Una vez leí que usted dijo que las personas que se dedican a crear polémica es porque carecen de talento, cuentan con una colosal vanidad, sin olvidar su ansiedad por atención...

—Si alguna vez lo dije, usted lo dijo mejor; si usted lo dijo mejor, aténgase a las consecuencias...

—¿Qué opina de aquél que se ríe solo?

—¡No caeré en la trampa de hablar mal de mí!

—¿Por qué no se ha casado?

—¿Lo envió mi novia?

—¿Es cierto que a usted le da por destruir libros?

—Ay sí, y ahora es que a usted le da por salvarlos...

—¿Por qué se ha burlado del anterior alumno?

—Porque no lo conocía a usted todavía...

—¿Es usted jansenista? ¿Es usted la salista?

—Jansenista político-antijesuítico-galicista...

—¿Qué le preguntaría a Vila-Matas?

—¿Fuma mariguana?

—¿Sobre qué escribe usted, señor Eduardo Hocquetot? ¿Lo pronuncié bien?

—Escribo cosas que no interesan.

—Ese último libro suyo no tiene ni pies ni cabeza...
—Como podrá corroborar su ADN no es humano, además ese libro lo extravié. ¿Dónde lo leyó?

—¿Para qué escribe?
—Escribo para dejar de escribir.

— ¿Qué opina de los políticos...?
—Es más común que a los políticos no les interese el bien común, es más, común a todos es que tengamos sangre de políticos puesto que a ninguno nos interesa el bien común.

—Fuentes fidedignas me han confirmado que a usted le otorgaron el primer lugar del prestigiosísimo Premio Latinoamericano de Relato Maldoror, pero una vez abiertas las plicas decidieron otorgárselo a otra persona debido a su corta edad, ya que no era recomendable dársele a un mozalbete, y en su lugar le dieron una mención honorífica.

—Asimismo mijo. Y se verán cosas, dijo el Señor.

— ¿De qué manera le gustaría morir?
— De amor verdadero.

— ¿Ha pensado en el suicidio?
— En la vanidad del suicidio...

— ¿Es cierto que a los artistas no les gusta trabajar?
— Eso es un mito. La realidad es que no les gusta pagarles a los artistas por su trabajo, quieren que todo sea gratis, como no es un bien tangible sino un bien inmaterial, los empresarios e instituciones educativas, todo el sistema, por lo menos en este país, no remuneran la creación intelectual humana. Creen, por ignorancia, que no sirve para nada, pero esta mentalidad es producto o consecuencia del sistema en que vivimos. Por ejemplo, vea el caso de Colombia, por concepto de propiedad intelectual se percibe más que por hostelería y energía. Le hablaré de cifras para que más o menos tenga una idea y compare nuestro país con otros de la región y de Latinoamérica:

Honduras posee el promedio más bajo de exportaciones de libros

en Centroamérica. Sólo en 2012, a pesar de haber registrado un mayor número de títulos publicados en relación a Cuba, Nicaragua y El Salvador, su consumo fue interno. Costa Rica es el país de la región que más publica libros y exporta más. Solo en 2102 los ticos publicaron 1844 libros y generaron 7.6 millones de dólares por exportación. Panamá, pese a publicar menos libros, un total de 802, exportó 10.7 millones de dólares en libros. Vea usted que la industria editorial es importante y en Honduras no ha habido una política de venta de imaginario e identidad cultural y nacional. Por su parte, Guatemala publicó 991 libros y solo registró 3.2 millones de dólares. El Salvador y Honduras son los países con similar producción de libros, pero El Salvador percibió por exportación 5.3 millones de dólares, en cambio Honduras 0.1 millones de dólares. Ni el millón exportamos. Nicaragua, que solo publicó la cuarta parte de lo que publicó Honduras, generó 0.7 millones de dólares, más que nosotros. Póngase a pensar entonces dónde radica el error: en las políticas del Estado. España y Brasil son los países que más publican, el primero con 112,684 libros, generando 554.7 millones de dólares, y Brasil 65,745 libros para un total de 26.2 millones en concepto de exportación. México, que produce menos que Brasil, sumó un total de 147.7 millones de dólares en exportaciones. Argentina publicó 27,661 libros y registró en sus arcas 43.7 millones de dólares. También somos un país consumista de libros. Pero pensemos, y saquemos cálculos, si exportáramos en libros igual o similar cantidad que Costa Rica, Panamá o El Salvador, cuánto generaría esta actividad editorial en impuestos, en movimiento de insumos, a nuestro país, sin contar el beneficio para autores y editores. Desde 15 a 32 millones de lempiras para las arcas del Estado. ¿Y esta cantidad de dinero para qué podría servir? Más de lo que se presupuesta para IHADFA e INAM.

Ahora bien, concluyo mi respuesta a su pregunta citando a Charles Bukowski: “¿Cómo diablos puede un ser humano disfrutar que un reloj de alarma lo despierta a las 5:30 a.m. para brincar de la cama, sentarse en el excusado, bañarse y vestirse, comer a la fuerza, cepillarse los dientes y cabello y encima luchar con el tráfico para llegar a un lugar en donde usted, esencialmente, hace montañas de dinero para alguien más, y encima si le preguntan, debe mostrarse

agradecido por tener la oportunidad de hacer eso?”

No se trata del artista, sino del ser humano en esta sociedad nuestra.

(Aplausos)

– ¿Qué tan cierto es el rumor de que usted ha besado pandas?

– Aunque usted no lo crea son muy amigables. Pero lo más increíble es que padecen de Alzheimer, gracias a ello me ahorro futuros reclamos derivados de nuestros affaires.

– ¿Hay otro Dios menos común en el que sí cree?

– Sí, en la fe. O quizás en el ceviche.

– ¿Es cierto que usted cambió su estilo de escritura, del arrebatado y el paroxismo pasó a la moderación y a lo fantástico?

– Es fantástico que usted lo mencione...

– ¿Ha oído hablar de los huidobrianos?

– Oí de ellos. ¿Una vieja tribu, no? ¿Cómo le decimos a los nativos desposeídos y explotados, los que no gozan del beneficio del Estado y sufren espantosas carencias, aquellos que su modo de vida es la precariedad...? Oh, sí, ya recordé, etnias. Los huidobrianos fueron una etnia, ¿o me equivoco? Y si bien recuerdo en la actualidad solo queda un último hablante huidobriano.

– ¿Qué opina usted sobre los europeos y demás países del mundo que solo se interesan por nosotros como una mestiza fauna exótica...

– Cuando echan un vistazo a nuestros países solo es para entretenerse de nuestra tan desventurada vida, de lo riesgoso que es comerse un pan y tomarse un vaso con agua; pero véalo con otros ojos, con ojos limpios y puros al mejor estilo europeo: a poco no es simpático que sea tan difícil alimentar con un dólar al día a una familia de cinco personas, es más, en lo personal pienso que es tan gracioso que a causa de la violencia de nuestro país haya más carne muerta de seres humanos que arroz y frijoles para alimentar a una persona. Además, piense que no es nada fácil hacerse un nombre a nivel mundial, y Honduras lo ha conseguido, por mérito y con mucho

esfuerzo. Somos la capital de la muerte y esto, francamente, es emocionante.

-¿Qué le motivó a escribir?

-El aburrimiento. Y probablemente personas como usted.

-¿Como yo? ¿Cómo así?

-Sí, personas como usted que son personas como yo y que no tienen qué comer y a causa del desempleo masivo deben ocuparse en cualquier actividad o buscar un oficio; algunos matan, otros mueren; hay quienes sobreviven, otros callan, otros tienen lenguas prolíficas y viperinas, otros limpian vidrios de carros en los semáforos, otros prefieren los malabares con fuego, otros se vuelven militares, otros políticos, narcos, delincuentes, incluso empresarios, como verá, para todos hay un oficio, y una vocación, y yo encontré el mío.

-¿Desde qué edad comenzó a sentir la “inspiración”?

-Desde que comencé a inspirar.

-¿Cuál es su temática preferida y por qué?

-El fútbol.

-¿Creció en un ambiente que favorecía la lectura o no?

-No lo había pensado, y tiene razón, la lectura se favorece de mí.

-¿Qué ve que yo no veo?

-A mi novia.

-¿Qué tipo de preguntas puede responder un escritor si le exigimos un cierto grado de solvencia?

-¿Económica? Pues ¿Le gustaría ir a cenar?

Risas entre el público.

-¿Su inspiración está basada en su condición de ser humano normal o bajo el efecto de algún estupefaciente?

-Si hay un ser humano debajo de mí mientras viene la inspiración, seguramente estoy sobre algún efecto y no bajo un efecto. ¿Usted qué cree?

-¿Qué podría hacer para llegar a hacer un buen escritor?

-Tenga hijos.

-Perdón, quise decir para llegar a ser un buen escritor...

-Retenga la respiración.

-¿Qué te motiva a estar vivo?

-Las motivaciones se acabaron hace un buen rato. Creo que el temor. El temor es una poderosa herramienta que no hemos sabido explotar.

-¿Qué es lo que realmente quiere que nos quede como gesto en el rostro cuando terminamos un libro suyo?

-Tenga cuidado, en todo caso, de hacérsela a Vila-Matas. Te respondería que cada lector es dueño de su propio rostro y yo no tengo nada que ver con el estado que quede ese rostro.

-¿Crees que leer poesía en la calle es pendejada, postura o deber moral del poeta?

-La gloria o el mérito de ciertos hombres consiste en escribir bien; el de otros consiste en no escribir, decía la Bruyere; el de otros en leer o en tener moral; pero no creo que tenga nada de malo leer en la calle, hay quienes les hablan y cantan a las plantas y otros a los animales, si alguien quiere leerle a una calle, que lo haga, quizás se abra o se alargue o se lo trague, como ocurrió en Guatemala en el 2010. Solo de imaginarlo... sería un estupendo performance.

-¿Considera que los escritores son unos vanidosos egocéntricos que se creen el ombligo del mundo?

-Balzac decía que hay que dejar la vanidad a los que no tienen otra cosa que exhibir.

-¿Y usted que exhibe?

-¡Mis dientes! Por dios, ¡mis dientes!

-Un último mensaje para nuestro joven auditorio.

-Lo felicito, para ser tan joven, supo retener a tantas personas.

Pero antes de despedirme quiero citar una frase de Voltaire, un autor que deberíamos de leer antes que al 99% de nuestros autores:

“A los tontos todo les maravilla en un autor apreciado; pero yo, que leo para mí, sólo apruebo lo que me gusta.”

See you later, alligator.

Se cierra el micrófono. Algunos alumnos se acercan al podio, otros se marchan a la puerta, astutamente. Eduardo Ilussio Hocquetot da uno que otro apretón de manos, otros lo abrazan, pero otros, y estos los más terribles, le dicen que lo admiran. A Hocquetot lo apresuran los miembros de la junta directiva de la Universidad Desconocida, piensan llevarlo a comer. Hocquetot se despide entre uno que otro aplauso y uno que otro resentimiento.

POETRY/ POESIA

La casa sin sombra

by Claudio Archubi

Por la noche mi día muerto

con tu día muerto se reúne.

Vasko Popa (Lejos en nosotros. 1951)

Esta es la casa del cero y del nunca, la de las más tristes excusas.

Largo es el viaje mientras el viento golpea las ventanas rotas, como en una película inglesa. Largo es el viaje y nuestros pensamientos que crecen, de un cuarto a otro, como flores tardías, mecidos por el invierno.

En la primera habitación él no está.

En la segunda habitación ella no está.

La tercera habitación estuvo siempre reservada para nosotros.

Él dijo:

Mi madre me regaló una flor que se deshace.

(No le echas agua, echale tierra.)

Es una flor seca que vive en la sombra, mantiene la casa limpia, llama al silencio.

Es una flor duradera como una foto vieja, como una idea, como un dolor.

Dice que compite con los cactus, con los matorrales del desierto, con las cosas que se escriben en las piedras.

(Cuando no estemos ni tu padre ni yo...)

La casa estaba limpia, extremadamente limpia.

Pero ella me dio la espalda y siguió con sus cosas.

Ella dijo:

Atada a un corazón amigo iba por una pradera de sombra.

A mi paso, un mundo de ceniza y simulacro.

(Mi padre había muerto y seguía trabajando.
Amanecía.)

También yo había muerto, pero no mi hambre.
Miré a todos con tristeza.
Y extendí los brazos hacia mi pradera de sombra.
Cuán corta la correa de la vida, cuán vasta mi pradera de
sombra.
Latí adentro de la casa negra, la casa blanca, la casa roja.
Latí adentro de la media-vida, de la media-muerte.
Y vi mi hambre en cada cosa.

(Lo veía caminar hacia la fábrica por la calle desierta. Lo veía con
mi cabeza en la ventana, encorvado y ejemplar, avanzar entre la
basura que volaba, avanzar hacia la estática de una radio lejana,
lejanísima, hasta perderse en lo Abierto. Se llevaba su tesón y una
parte de mi cuerpo para siempre.

¿Dónde estaba mi hermana?

Mi madre no quería dejarme salir porque afuera hacía frío.
Había algo de verdad en eso, lo sospechaba...)

Me quedé quieta.

Todo atravesaba mi pradera de sombra.

House without shadow

by Claudio Archubi

*In the evening my day dead
meets with your dead day.*

Vasko Popa (Lejos en nosotros. 1951)

This is the house of zero and never, of the saddest excuses.

Long is the trip as the wind hits the broken windows, as in an English movie. Long is the journey and our thoughts that grow from one room to another, as late flowers, swaying in the winter.

In the first room he's not.

In the second room she is not.

The third room was always reserved for us.

He said:

My mother gave me a flower that melts.

(Do not throw water, throw dirt.)

It's a dried flower that lives in the shadows, keeps the house clean, calls silence.

It's a durable flower as an old photo, as an idea, as a pain.

Says it competes with cactus, with desert scrub, with things that are written on stones.

(When we are not with you, neither your father nor I ...)

The house was clean, extremely clean.

But she turned away and continued with her things.

She said:

Tied to a heart and the friend was going through a meadow shade.
On my way a world of ash and drill.

(My father had died and was still working.
It dawns.)

I also had died, but not my hunger.
I looked at everyone sadly.
And I spread my arms to my meadow shadow.
How short life's belt, how vast my meadow shadow.
I beat inside the black house, the white house, red house.
I beat inside the half-life, half-death.
And I saw my hunger in everything.

(I saw him walking down the deserted street towards the factory.
I saw him with my head in the window, bowed and exemplary, move
through the flying trash, moving towards the static of a distant radio,
very distant, till he got lost in the open. It carries his tenacity and a
part of my body forever.

Where was my sister?
My mother would not let me out because it was cold outside.
There was some truth in that, I suspected ...)

I stood still.
Everything went through my meadow shadow.

Dijeron ellos mismos, *los que se fueron:*

By Claudio Archubi

Caminamos pero el sol nos aturde.

Danos danos un poco de sombra.

La nube de un corazón bajo el cual partir.

Él dijo:

Me empujaron a esta casa donde todo está quieto.

He plantado un árbol y lo he visto pudrirse.

Mi árbol y yo crecíamos bajo un cielo limpio y sin pureza, acercándonos sobre la frescura del moho, entrelazados, a la espera del fruto del nunca, del donde sea.

(Lentos nos deshacíamos como el hielo que flota en las lagunas del Sur.)

Al compás del viento lo he visto pudrirse.

Mientras mis pies se hundían en el barro, fui su alimento: descendí para ir más alto, de la raíz a la última nervadura, la inestable de cara al cielo.

(En este jardín olvidado no creíamos en la muerte, no creíamos en la vida.

Soñábamos hacia abajo.

Morían las piedras antes que nosotros, buscando ampliar el paraíso.)

Dijo el coro de los testigos:

Hubo un tiempo en que se descendía a los infiernos cantando.

Ahora es tiempo de cantar para encontrar la salida.

Ella dijo:

Hemos cuidado esta casa con el cielo adentro.

(Con el cielo adentro.)

Pasa la tormenta por la pared rota, del suelo brota el arroyo.

Son verdes los restos de esta casa. Él reposa en su interior quieto como en un viejo cuadro. Caen ideas en la hojarasca, no las escucha, son como los vasos rotos bajo la nube blanca: flores del vacío.

(Sobre nosotros la ciudad lanza su flecha de dos puntas, su dado en blanco.

Sobre nosotros la ciudad bambolea hacia arriba y hacia abajo su gran linterna, obstruida por nube y calavera, dislocada, hacia atrás y hacia adelante y hacia otros sitios.)

Soplada nuestra casa, su marco de musgo, con el cielo adentro.

Pasa la rata, desorientado huésped, tan rápida como la vida. Y la araña espera en el rincón a que se detenga el viento.

(Pero yo comí de lo que es.)

Tiembla la niebla por la noche.

La invitamos a nuestro cuarto como se invita a un recuerdo.

(Ahora la niebla desciende de la terraza al patio, crece el cielo sepultado en mi cuerpo.

Nuestro árbol se pudre, pero su raíz está viva.)

Dijo la voz del televisor:

El código de la ciudad perdido en la niebla, frente al río, o bajo cartones que aletean en la calle cubriendo los cuerpos, o más allá de campos sumergidos donde la siembra no es posible: otras cosas crecen.

They said themselves, *the ones that were gone:*

By Cladio Archubi

We walked but the sun stuns us.

Give us, give us some shade.

The cloud of a heart under which we go.

He said:

They pushed me into this house where everything is still.

I planted a tree and I saw it rot.

My tree and I were growing under a clear sky without purity,
approaching the freshness of mold, intertwined, and awaiting the
fruit of never, from wherever.

(Slow, we undo like ice floating in the lagoons of the South.)

With the wind compass I've seen rot.

As my feet sank into the mud, I was his food: I went down to go
higher, from the root to the last rib, unstable facing the sky.

(In this forgotten garden we did not believe in death, did not
believe in life.

We dreamed down.

Stones were dying before us, looking to expand paradise.)

The chorus of witnesses said:

There was a time when you could descend into hell singing.

Now it's time to sing to find the exit.

She said:

We have taken care of this house with the sky in.

(With the sky in.)

Storm passes through the broken wall, from the soil springs the stream.

Green are the remains of this house. He lies in its interior still like an old picture. Ideas fall in the dead leaves, he don't listen to them, and they are like broken glass under the white cloud: flowers from the void.

(Above us the city launches its double-headed arrow, his dice in blank.

Above us the city wobbles up and down with his big flashlight, blocked by cloud and skull, dislocated, backward and forward and elsewhere.)

Blown our house, its frame of moss, with the sky inside.

The rat passes by, disoriented guest, as fast as life. And the spider waits in the corner for the wind to stop.

(But I ate what it is.)

The mist trembles at the evening.

We invited her to our room as inviting a memory.

(Now the fog descends from the terrace to the courtyard, the sky grows buried in my body.

Our tree rots but its root is alive.)

The TV voice said:

The city code lost in the fog, facing the river, or under cardboard flapping on the street covering the bodies, or beyond submerged fields where planting is not possible: other things grow.

Él y ella se escucharon:

By Claudio Archubi

Encima del mantel, vi crecer sobre tu corazón otro más fuerte, vi cómo tu piel se endurecía, envolviéndolo, como el centro de mesa a la naturaleza muerta.

(Intentaba envolverte a ti)

Vi los platos blancos.

(En tu pecho, me distrajo el viento)

Vi tu nunca y tu no.

(No viste el signo de mi pregunta)

Vi en la mesa puesta la manzana de loza.

(Hacia la periferia, como la flecha alegórica, tu mirada, sin llegar nunca. Salí a buscarla. La puse ahí, en el centro)

Él y ella se dijeron

En la mañana

(En la tarde)

En la casa sola

(Tu taza sola)

La rosa seca

(El tallo en alto)

La taza al sol

(No la sostuve)

Por encima de la torre de las cosas.

(El amor no era esa torre)

Caíamos seguíamos subiendo.

Dijeron a coro los espíritus:

Levanten la piedra de la vida, queremos salir.

*De un lado a otro, en pos de un sonido lejano, nuestros corazones de tierra,
repitiéndose, repitiéndose, nuestra lengua gastada deseando atraparlo.*

Él y ella se dijeron:

Arrodillada, has comido de mis vísceras creyendo encontrar
en ellas las vísceras de los otros.

(La presencia, su rota escalera enredada en tu cuerpo)

Música muerta de la entraña en mí comías.

Tierra sin cielo comías, cansancio, piedra y sombra.

(Y comiendo te escuchaba.)

Yo sólo escuchaba el sonido de tu boca en la casa sin nadie.

Quería alimentarte y te abrazaba en silencio.

(Pasó mi boca por tus palabras, entraron mis manos por tus
palabras.)

Al encontrarme me encontró tu error.

Dijeron las voces del televisor:

Nuestros pies se deshacen, nuestras manos se deshacen escarbando por un poco de sombra.

Llueve.

Bebemos el cielo en el fondo del pozo.

Él y ella dijeron:

Nos hemos acostumbrado al dolor.

(Nuestro dolor es la única costumbre.)

Ella abre las puertas, pero ya estoy adentro.

Ella, la que no me ve.

(Abro la puerta para que él me vea.)

De un lado a otro avanzo y caigo con torpeza: he tropezado con ella. De un lado a otro hago la nada con una orden.

(Estamos en nuestra casa, nuestro cielo sin sombra. Nos mantiene juntos un remoto y tristísimo olor.)

Ella prepara la comida para nadie.

A veces creemos que los hongos de las paredes son verdes mariposas. Nos cubrimos con los bordes de la vida.

(Nos cubrimos con los bordes de la muerte)

Dormimos.

(Dormimos)

Dijeron a coro los testigos:

La ciudad estaba dentro de la casa.

Atravesamos la casa como se atraviesa un error.

Ellos dijeron:

En el jardín cerrado de esta casa cerrada hemos construido el amor.

Lo hemos dibujado, trazo por trazo sobre la pared blanca, y bajo un cielo descubierto y frío nos hemos sentado a contemplarlo.

Fue creciendo en la primavera como una flecha hacia el invierno, como crece un brazo sobre la vacía mesa del pensamiento.

Crecía como un regalo de la muerte.

(Salimos de la casa buscando un lugar donde morir.

Y en el camino, una ruta muy larga, hacia ninguna parte, nos cruzamos con nuestro primer maestro, que ya había muerto.)

Contra nuestro plato de hojarasca, contra nuestro cuerpo quieto, su vaso con aire.

Contra la sombra que espera, contra el último vidrio y contra el último sol.

Dimos un regalo a la muerte.

(Lo vimos a lo lejos, de espaldas, caminar con lentitud, su traje roído por un mapa de lluvias, de polvorientos errores.

Quisimos acercarnos, parecía fácil, pero siempre lo teníamos por delante.

Quisimos llamarlo, pero no se detenía.)

Hemos dibujado sin descanso y después hemos borrado sin descanso.

(Así continuó enseñándonos, en silencio, viejas aporías, perseverancia, y a caminar en la oscuridad.)

Y la hemos seguido a ella, maestra del blanco.

Dijo el coro de los espíritus:

*Vibró un árbol de cemento con raíces de cemento en la mente del constructor,
escapando de la muerte, hacia otra caverna más grande, más luminosa, rascando
con las antenas desde las ramas más altas, hacia la Nada y sus ventanas.*

Nosotros vibramos con él, ascendimos con él, hacia la estrella sola.

Soñábamos con el Fénix: estaba muerto.

Estaba muerto y seguía volando.

Yo dije volvamos a la casa.

(Volvimos).

En la casa las sillas se mueven solas cuando bajamos la vista.

Nuestras manos se mueven solas cuando cerramos los ojos.

Pero nuestros cuerpos se acercan sin poder tocarse.

(Estamos creando el pasado).

La casa hundida a pleno sol.

Digo bajemos las persianas.

Digo cerremos las puertas, para que algo quede, cerremos con
llave todas las puertas.

(La sábana rota, en el cordel al viento, nuestra última bandera).

He and she heard each other:

By Claudio Archubi

On the tablecloth, I saw on your heart another one growing
stronger, I saw your skin hardened, enveloping him, as the
centerpiece of the still life.

(Was trying to wrap you)

I saw white dishes.

(In your chest, I was distracted by the wind)

I saw you never and I saw you not.

(You did not see the sign of my question)

I saw the crockery apple set over the table.

(Towards the periphery, as the allegorical arrow, your look,
without ever coming. I went out to get her. I put her there, in the
middle)

He and she said

In the morning

(In the afternoon)

In the lonely house

(Your lonely cup)

The dry rose

(The stem high)

Cup at the sun

(I did not held it)

Above the tower of things.

(Love was not that tower)

We fell we kept going up.

The spirits chorused:

Raise the stone of life, we want to go out.

From side to side, towards a distant sound, our hearts of dust,
repeating, repeating, our worn tongue wishing to catch him.

He and she said:

Kneeled down, you have eaten from my guts expecting to find in
them the viscera of others.

(The presence, its broken ladder entangled in your body)

Dead music from my wounds you ate.
Earth without sky you ate, fatigue, stone and shadow.

(And eating, I listened to you.)

I only heard the sound of your mouth in the house without
anyone.

I wanted to feed you and held you in silence.

(My mouth passed through your words, my hands entered
through your words.)

While I found myself your error found me.

The TV voices said:

Our feet fall apart, our hands fall apart scrambling for a little shadow.

Rains.

We drink the sky in the bottom of the well.

He and she said:

We have become accustomed to pain.

(Our pain is the only habit.)

She opens the door, but I'm already in.

She, the one who does not see me.

(I open the door
for him to see me.)

From side to side I advance and fall awkwardly: I stumbled on her. From side to side I do nothing with an order.

(We are in our house, our sky
without shadow. It keeps us together, a remote and very sad smell.)

She prepares food for anyone.

Sometimes we believe that fungi of the walls are green butterflies.
We cover with the edges of life.

(We cover with the edges of death)

We slept.

(We slept)

The witnesses chorused:

The city was inside the house.

We went through the house as you go through an error.

They said:

In the enclosed garden of this house we have built love.

We have drawn, stroke by stroke over the white wall, under an opened cold sky we have sat to contemplate.

It grew in the spring as an arrow towards winter, as it grows an arm over the table of empty thought.

It grew up as a gift of death.

(We leave the house looking for a place to die.

And along the way, a very long route to nowhere, we came across our first teacher, who had already died.)

Against our plate of litter, against our still body, his glass with air.

Against the waiting shade, against the last glass and against the last sun.

We gave death a gift.

(We saw him at the distance, his back, walking slowly, his suit gnawed by a map of rains, from dusty errors.

We wanted to get closer, it looked easy, but he always was ahead.

We wanted to call him, but did not stop.)

We have drawn without rest and then we deleted without rest.

(He continued teaching us, silently, old aporiae, perseverance, and to walk in the dark.)

And we followed her master of white.

The chorus of spirits said:

*A tree of cement vibrated with cement roots in the mind of the builder,
escaping death, to a larger cavern, brighter, scratching with antennas from the
highest branches, into nothingness and windows.*

We vibrated with him, we ascended with him, to the lonely star.

*We dreamed of Phoenix: he was dead.
He was dead and still flying.*

I said let's go back to the house.

(We returned).

In home the chairs move alone when we look down.
Our hands move alone when we close our eyes.
But our bodies approach without being able to touch.

(We're creating the past).

The house sunk in full sun.
I say we lower the blinds.
I say we close the doors, so that something remains; lets close
and lock all doors.

(The broken sheet, in the string the wind, our last flag).

Fragmentos De Raimunda

By Carmen Berenguer

La expatriada Raimunda está hablando
sin tierra les habla desde el aire
inhala y expulsa improperios casi
difunta susurra su lengua espesa
donde cantar no puede su letanía

Fuera del edén la pordiosera Raimunda
vocifera Me he tragado un volcán y bailo
y canto Me usaron y uso fármacos para
dormirte occidente. En una balsa al mar
para mecerte

Este fragmento es para ti porque ya no
puedo contigo ni mirarte puedo
Allí donde habité por siglos y siglos
se va perdiendo en un hilo el infinito
porque nada queda ya ni el seguro de la puerta
ni el púrpura malva de tu boca
se quebró de espanto

Este fragmento es para ti porque ya no
puedo contigo ni mirarte puedo
llí donde habité por siglos
se perdió en el infinito nada queda
el cerrojo de la puerta ni el pubis de tus labios
sólo el mujido espanta

después que te entregué los hijos
después que acosté contigo
hablé hasta el alba pariendo

Irene Paulova es la reina de las noches moscovitas

By Carmen Berenguer

se parece a Rusia,
se parece a Hong Kong,
se parece a mayamicito en Bolivia,
se parece a BladeRunner,
se parece a los derrumbes,
se parece a la tarde,
se parece a las nubes rosadas de la tarde,
se parece a un justo invierno,
se parece a las telarañas de la Babuchka,
se parece a mi amigo viejo,
se parece a su abrigo gris,
se parece a su semblante adusto,
se parece a la niebla
se parece a los pobres
se parece a esta ciudad
se parece a este rincón
se parece a este vacío
se parece a este abismo
se parece a esta angustia
se parece a este insomnio
se parece a este chifón
se parece a tu rostro
se parece al olvido

Sayal de pieles

By Carmen Berenguer

Allí quedoses sudando
Oh fragorosos tumbados
enhierbados suda
leprosos de yerba suda
volcanos de piedra suda
sulfur de hirbaletosos
escalpados de suda sodados
sobados sarnadosquedoses
simbiados de jugos quesos
carnosos refregados de hirba
malesosquedoses
turbados y sudales
salar quedose la turba
salares los paisajes quedos

piel que al porar abrazas
súdasesúbese pálpese
marca de higo sulfo
oñasa añico piela
sajada de corte soma
sastra de pieles
lustra de pieles
sargal de pieles
sarao de piel
sayal de pieles
sarna de piel
sartal de pieles
sanguipielosa
sanícula pielina
onco de pieles
genes pielesa
saloma sarcoma
pielasa rosadelfa
que al rosarse es rizal de piel
y al rozarse es soma

sidosa de sudas sudal de sida

Era Mi Hermana

By Chary Gumeta

Para ella, quien corto estrellas

De los árboles que crecen en los cielos.

Quería que mi hermana dejara de contar historias
Dejara de ser hormiga y que usará sus sueños
Para columpiarse en la luna.
Era mi hermana, la única, la mayor,
La madre que no tenía hijos
La que razonaba sobre mí.

A veces era muy mi hermana
Con sus ojos de obsidiana
Con su piel de abedul
Siempre recogiendo las quimeras mías
Y de mi hermana
Siempre siendo más mamá
Que hermana mayor.

Mi hermana era esa sombra por la casa
Era la heroína que me salvaba del dragón
La que destruía los monstros
Que vivían en mis sueños
Tan solo al cantarme una canción.

Nunca nos confiamos nada
Ni nos tocamos con las manos
Era mayor decían
Era la que debía cuidarme decían,
Jamás compartimos los zapatos,
Ni el maquillaje, ni el vestido,
Ni la sonrisa de sus novios.

Hace un tiempo que mi hermana
Dejó de andar como fantasma por la casa
Dejó de cortarse el pelo y las uñas

Dejó de teñir su vida
Porque aquello de los sueños,
Los guardo en un cofre de ilusión.

Era mi hermana,
Mi énfasis, mi cariño, la mejor.

Marcela,
By Chary Gumeta

Cuando vengan por nosotras
Sacudiremos el polvo de los recuerdos
Sin cerrar los ojos
Para que queden gravados en la retina

Recordaremos los días de fiesta
En que los demonios nos daban de beber
Licores infernales

Y como hasta el suceso menos gracioso
Nos hacía reír a carcajadas.

Cuando vengan por nosotras
Detendremos el tiempo,
Nos abrazaremos fuertemente
Y por primera vez
Nos diremos la verdad,
Habláremos de la lluvia sobre el pasto
Y del silencio que éramos
Cada vez que destruíamos las palabras.

Cuando vengan por nosotras
Amada Marcela,
Recordaremos nuestra complicidad
Y de como el exilio no nos destruyó el corazón.

Ya reconciliadas

Me daré cuenta
Que hemos sido asesinadas.

Sucumbía la noche

By Chary Gumeta

Y daba paso a la aurora.
Titilaban las estrellas
Anunciando el amanecer;
Los motores de los primeros autos
Ronroneaban por las calles.
En la Iglesia,
Sonaban las campanas del reloj
Y las manecillas se acomodaban;
Tú lo mirabas con el rabillo del ojo
Y fingías estar distraído.
La separación se acercaba a cada momento
Y el corazón lo sabía.
El bus se estacionaba en la parada
Me miraste a los ojos en silencio,
Era la despedida.
Uno no es nadie mientras llueve,
Uno solo soporta las gotas de agua en el rostro,
Uno levanta la mano instintivamente para decir adiós.

...y el corazón
Es solo ese músculo que se agranda
Y se achica aceleradamente
Mientras en el estómago
Se abren los capullos de las mariposas
Para salir volando.

Perla y Jade

By Leticia Luna

La mujer dice	el tiempo se ha apagado
El hombre	intenta conciliar el sueño
La mujer	pone cara de reloj descompuesto
El hombre	se apresura a componerla
La mujer	cree que es una flor y se marchita
El hombre	le da una cerveza por el tallo
La mujer	llora una lluvia de estrellas sobre el frutero
El hombre	se las come hambriento
La mujer	canta mariposas
El hombre	abre la ventana para verlas volar
La mujer	trae a casa un oso y un delfín para ver morir la luna
El hombre	aúlla sin convertirse en lobo
La mujer	va a la playa y regresa
Al hombre	le han crecido dos ramas
La mujer	tiene un girasol en la mirada
El hombre	es una guitarra azul
La mujer	va a un mitin
El hombre	siempre ha estado ahí
La mujer	resbala por el índice del Tiempo
El hombre	la atrapa en el pulgar del Cielo
La mujer	ronronea
El hombre	lame
La mujer	da a luz una Letra
El hombre	se llena de gozo

La letra balbucea y se convierte en música
se alza y ya es una palabra
Pronto será un texto vivo

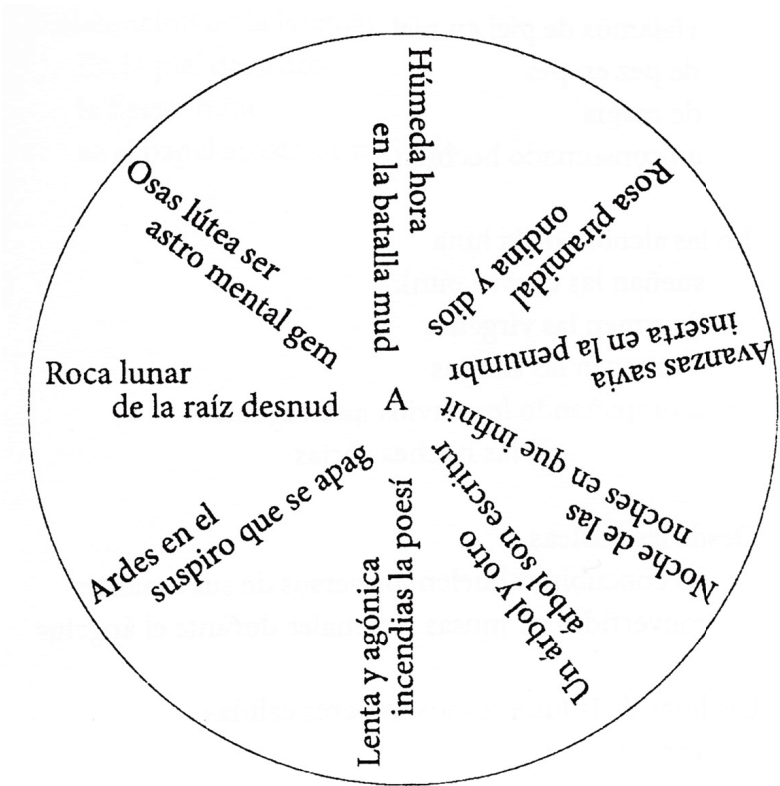
Jade y Perla

By Leticia Luna

Pronto será un texto vivo
se alza y ya es una palabra
La letra balbucea y se convierte en música

La mujer	se llena de gozo
El hombre	da a luz una Letra
La mujer	lame
El hombre	ronronea
La mujer	lo atrapa en el pulgar del Cielo
El hombre	resbala por el índice del Tiempo
La mujer	siempre ha estado ahí
El hombre	va a un mitin
La mujer	es una guitarra azul
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El hombre	pone cara de reloj descompuesto
La mujer	intenta conciliar el sueño
El hombre dice	el tiempo se ha apagado

Hora lunar
By Leticia Luna



El Odre Del Caos

By Leticia Luna

*A Isidore Ducasse
Conde de Lautréamont
Imagen de la piel
que cambia*

Cada cambio de piel es un jinete en el odre
noctívago de las vírgenes salvajes. *Circumsilio* de
caverna, polvo de animal agazapado. ¡Jamás tu sueño de
anfíbio tocó el acerado cometa del *lutum* terrenal!

La serpiente nunca obtendrá el timbre afrutado de tu canto, ni las
cabras aspirarán el viento de la montaña observando tu ascenso.
¡Gaita, compañera de los viajes por el *tempus*!

Millones de seres poseídos por la carne se arrastran para salir del
fango. ¡Bestia humana! ¡Eres como el león que cayó dominado
por la
oscuridad! Tú que has bebido de los pozos del arrepentimiento,
escucha el color tan nítido del estruendo del viento esta noche.

Al regresar a mi refugio nocturno, los arcángeles del odio me
miran solitarios. La luna vagabundea por las azoteas, vuela en
el centro de la moneda. ¡Hologramas! ¡Laberintos! Ojo egipcio
de mi sentido espiritual.

Ahora sólo necesito un paraje de viento,
vibrando a la altura de un tono, lleno de
luxuria.

Tercer canto
(la conquista)
By Héctor Flores

Quinientos años de invasión
quinientos ríos de sangre
quinientos años de vida
quinientos años muriendo
para volver a vivir.

Quinientos años presos
quinientos años cojos
quinientos años privados
de la posibilidad de abrir los ojos.

Doscientos años de España
doscientos años de criollos
cien años de azul y rojo
quinientos años de nadie.

Quinientos años haciéndonos
haciéndonos para ser lo que queremos...
la patria libre,
la tierra del venado.

La tribu Tepemechín

By Héctor Flores

La tribu emerge de la cordillera en llanto
llora sus arboles
y lamenta la fuga de sus ríos.
Ya no hay Tolupanes con cerbatana
se los llevó la 9 milímetros
que manda en el modernismo.

Ayer fueron más que ahora
y presienten que mañana serán menos que hoy
solo canto, solo llanto
Tolupanes en desbandada.

La tribu intenta en lo imposible
calientan agua para café
en la misma tinaja de barro
pero sus fuegos ya no queman ocote.

Ayer corrían tras el futuro
hoy acosan con desespero al pasado
y el presente se fue quedando solo

Yo habito este tiempo
me sumerjo en estos lares
habito el tiempo de los Tolupanes.

Negro que vistes de colores

By Héctor Flores

No dejes de empujar la canoa
ni de remar incansable en la playa
tú mezcla eterna de indio arawaco
no niega tu fuerza africana.

Esta tierra es tuya
tuya de ahora
y de herencia eterna
no debe el turismo imperialista
pescar en tus aguas azules
ni quedarse con tu suelo caribe.

Negro que pintas de color
la tierra que otros pintan de sangre
levanta fuerte tu nombre
por las cordilleras más allá de las fronteras
que trascienda la leyenda libertaria
de aquel guerrero Satuyé
que te vio libre y soberna
en estas aguas y su arena.

No dejes de remar al futuro
con tu negra piel y curtido empeño
aunque vengan a venderte espejos
tu historia es otra
negro primero
mantente libre
sobre tu suelo.

Esta tierra es tuya
para sembrar la yuca
y hacer la vida
para pescar dignidad
y hacer el Casabe
para gritarle al mundo que quizá no sabe

que aquí te matan
por el linaje.

Negro que pintas de color
la tierra que otros pintan con sangre
hacé la patria,
la patria garífuna
de mar, de tierra
de canoas y aradas...

Alas De Paloma

By Javier Alvarado

Después que dijo esto, escupió en la tierra, hizo barro con la saliva y lo puso sobre los ojos del ciego, diciéndole: “Ve a lavarte a la piscina de Siloé”, que significa “Enviado”. El ciego fue, se lavó y, al regresar, ya veía.

Juan 9 6-7:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Mujer de ojos vidriados:

Señor de abrigo raído:

Herédame la tierra.

Yo me quedé sin casa.

¿Por qué no construimos una?

No hay suelo en donde caerse.

Aún estamos vivos.

¿Es que no lo ve?

¿Qué cosa?

Una parte de mi está muerta.

Yo puedo revivir esa parte.

¿Cómo?

Imitando a las palomas.

¿A las palomas?

Ellas comen en las plazas.

Las migajas de la gente...

Comen en las plazas pero siempre andan volando.

Yo no tengo alas.

Construyamos una casa y busquemos nuestras alas.

Hay mucha miseria en el mundo.

Mi ropa interior es de periódico.

Mi ropa es extraída del patio interior de una basura.

Aún estamos tristes.

Mujer de ojos vidriados:	No tenemos en donde construir.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Aún estamos vivos.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿No ve que tengo los ojos vidriados?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Yo le puedo devolver lo humano a sus ojos.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿Cómo?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Llenándolos de vida.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿Cómo?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Escupiendo en el suelo y...
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Usted no hace milagros.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Aún no lo sabes.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	No hable babosadas.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Si quiere, escupamos los dos sobre la tierra.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Mejor cálese.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Escupa, yo escupo...
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Algo saldrá de la tierra.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Si, algo saldrá de la tierra.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿Algo como qué?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Lodo
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿Y?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Untémonos en los ojos y en el cuerpo.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿Y?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Naceremos de nuevo.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿Quiere usted que me desnude?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Tiene que ser así para untarse el lodo.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	La verdad que no comprendo.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Hagamos una casa.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Desde esta altura se contempla toda la ciudad.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Aquí hemos venido.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Aquí hemos venido.

Señor de abrigo raído:	A matarnos.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¿A matarnos?
Señor de abrigo raído:	Si, a matarnos...
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	¡No!
Señor de abrigo raído:	¿No?
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Quiero otros ojos
Señor de abrigo raído:	Construyamos una casa.
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Escupa.
Señor de abrigo raído:	¿Que escupa?
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Si, que escupa. Yo escupiré también.
Señor de abrigo raído:	¿Para qué quiere que escupamos?
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Si escupimos y escupimos habrá lodo suficiente para mis ojos y para hacer el barro con el que construiremos nuestra casa.
Señor de abrigo raído:	Sin duda, pisemos la tierra...
Mujer de ojos vidriados:	Quizás nos salgan alas de paloma.

By Javier Alvarado

John Ashbery

Bajo ese designio del sol y la lluvia permanentes.

Rememorando esas escenas donde se fraguaron cálamos de aire

Donde siguen revoloteando las historias

Y mis manos se vuelven A---V---E---S

Sobre la piel sanguinolenta de la caja de

viento

Mientras estamos solos en esta tierra que crece como una fruta de color compacto, ignorando la bóveda agrietada, el cuchillo que pendulea en la momificación de la carne.

La semilla estruja entonces el cántico de los jardines celestes,

Las metáforas cuelgan de las plumas de las águilas

Como una furiosa entrepierna que se abre camino, como una iguana que encuentra su sendero en la corteza

Como un orgasmo concebido en los surcos, como un gesto de osadía y aprehensión

En el crecimiento espiritual, en la crucifixión de las estrellas
donde la sangre dictamina su posición y evangelio, donde estas rocas
me lapidan sin conmiseración ni sonido;

Multiplicándose a si mismas con esta sensibilidad en la que me aíso, como un capullo orquestado en la combustión de la imagen, colmando la pureza de la muerte. (Ese sitio donde sólo hay huesos, donde sólo hay banderas)

Es más que este designio de mirar las aguas divididas, dispuestas en Canal

Mas que el recuerdo de la nieve y de las locomotoras que
versifican

Con su riel fantasma, ahora que estamos aquí, ¿Dónde están sus huellas

Sus esponsales, sus cuencas determinadas hacia el cielo de otra
prontitud?

¿Dónde esta la guía de ferrocarriles ahora que arden los vagones
energúmenos del tren?

Algún deseo permanecerá gravitando, así en el aire, aquí en el
istmo de Panamá y en sus otros istmos;

Así en el viento, así como cualquier vestigio de que leímos junto
a las aguas,

De que crecimos junto a alguna cicatrización, junto a alguna
música

Que nos retorne al reino de las ausencias salvajes, mientras un
animal vivo

Vuelve a habitar - otra vez- estas demencias y ausencias,
golpeadas en el cuero.

Donde

By Javier Alvarado

1. he querido enladrillar el mar y poner allí nuestras begonias en los patios,

2. peñascos donde se asieron las poblaciones del ejército blanco, blandiendo en la esquina
los lectores de la sangre.

3. escribir en una tabla de salvamento las auguraciones del naufragio

4. Contemplar desde esta bahía los barcos que se atestan de insomnio y de niebla,

5. Hurgar los ojos que no adivinaron la supremacía de la muerte y sus estrellas,

En la invasión inseparable del alma y del cuerpo; cuando en pesadillas oyes crujir la madera

Y luego el pentagrama de una legión de cigarras, dando cuerda al pájaro desdentado de la noche,

Que como una boca de sacerdotisa -Va humeando y culebreando -y al mismo tiempo-

Escribiendo fechas de citatorios en los espejos, Todo eso como si fuese la literatura de las sombras

6. encontramos en los baños, donde nos llegan voces soterradas
Voces que sucumben ante la labor de la piedra,

Cosas y seres que revelan su identidad a través de sus máscaras

Donde el otoño es una ofrenda indolente, un palafrenero que sin cesar va estableciendo las horas de llegada,

Un imperio de niños que sucumben como ratas

Y rapsodian una cantata para los flautistas que han muerto esgrimiendo la tela donde fulguran las posesiones.

Ajedrez

By Luis Carlos Mussó

64 escaques, un tablero. Tú de ébano ciego, yo de hueso-color. Te mueves en todas direcciones, pero tu abalorio recibe mi agujazo de hormigas. Los cuadros han medido tu silencio con un toque de incienso entre tus rodillas; y el peón adivina su salto diminuto sobre el tablero $[PxT]$. Tus torres se desladrillan en la diagonal de su cruz cuando entro en tu mezquita de rodillas $[PxA]$: aves de plumaje sin colores vuelan sobre el alfil mientras el caballo en celo revienta su casco de marfil en el coito de las laderas en ele, en forma de ele $[PxC]$. Poco falta para el sangrado del cielo aunque lucho y venzo en el enroque $[0-0-0]$. Son míos el susurro de los espacios, ese jardín incauto, el surco obediente de la espalda. El empeine de tu pie, a solo un casillero de mi lengua ofidia $[PxP4R]$. Culpas a la almohada de tus dolores –te ensañas con ella a mordiscos y lametones–. Pero no has caído en cuenta: somos ya un monstruo de doble espalda con fuegos de sal en el núcleo $[P5D+]$.

Cojea nuestro aliento en este juego de reyes. Mi ariete embiste/ barrena las carnes/ incursiona en la memoria/ se duele en ti/ nos inunda pues tu saliva lo festeja y lo corona –peón por reina–. El surco está abierto para las tablas: nadie sabe de quién es la victoria $[PxR++]$. Nadie sabe de quién, el jaque mate.

Estación sin nombre

by Luis Carlos Mussó

1

Las ciudades vacías
—donde no hay un mirto ni un azar
ni un verso—
fluyen revueltas de mi boca,
chasquea ahora una música en duermevela
Mi boca, vacía también,
degüella la sangre empecinada
en frecuentar la gallardía de las letrinas.

2

Bajo esas ciudades desemboca tintura de yodo
sobre el lomo de mis puñales
De nada sirve el recorrido
que va del Almacén de los Géneros Crudos
a los predios del Jardín Botánico, y de allí
hasta el Muelle de las Baratijas:
desdoblas una vieja carta de despedida
—todos los espacios son posibles
para esta poética del desastre—. Y la sangre
es el yodo que desemboca en mi mirada,
el túnel que silencia la herida. El testimonio.

3

Para lo que vale, la algazara de las ciudades
debería abandonar las orillas
Dispersar su alumbramiento
entre los extraños rostros del dolmen
Para lo que vale, la saturación
que bulle detrás de los pájaros
debería decirme
que en el homicidio, eso sí, estará mi fuerte.

Década

By Manuel Padilla Luna

I

Me ató las manos por detrás de la cabeza,
dice que si me resisto
va a robarse mi aliento o los cigarros,
pues sospecha estuve pensando en otras.

Que ya es tarde,
diez años más o menos,
desde que aquel le arrancó el brassier
en el asiento de atrás de un carro
queapestaba a abandono,
que debí ser yo
y no el producto de mezclar vodka y despecho.

Dice que le vuelva a acariciar la cabeza.
Que sólo yo sabré como es debajo de su ombligo.
Que no soporta las rodillas
por buscar el amor
y que le duele el amor
por doblar las rodillas.
Que a estas alturas de la vida,
aprendió que el amor
no se busca
ni se dobla,
solo se rompe o llega tarde.

II

“Muérdeme justo donde debería estar mi corazón”
luego se esfuman mis latidos
y me abandona.

Su cabello está hecho de viento
por eso todas las mujeres la odian
y despabila el ánimo de todos los hombres.
Yo creo que soy hombre.

Pero como ella me quiere lo duda.

Podría hacerle cosquillas pero le duele.

Según sé

la última vez que dijo te quiero

estaba frente a un espejo

y fué mentira.

Luego me da la espalda

pide le rodee la cintura,

da un largo trago

de algo que lleva una par de horas

en la copa de la mesita,

luego pide que le chupe las cicatrices

que mis labios son los únicos que no se las abrirán de nuevo,

me cose un beso sin lengua

donde me sobra el amor y me falta el aire.

III

Estoy desnudo.

Ella vestida.

Sin duda el invierno llega si la mirás a los ojos.

Juraría que cada vez que se aproxima

amenaza una tormenta.

Nunca he jurado en vano.

Prometer es otra historia.

Me clava sus garras en el torso,

me llena los párpados de grises,

secuestra al sol

y lo coloca entre sus piernas

y relampaguea con fuerza en mi rostro

hasta que su saliva

se vuelve tatuaje de lluvia interminable

que me baja por el cuello.

Ahora soy un charco que refleja su sonrisa.
Una ola que rompe mi pasado.
Una gota de sudor
que desmaquilla sus mejillas.

Me habla de otros, se tortura.
No comprendo como todo ese masoquismo
le cabe en la boca.

Se sienta en una silla
y me cuenta las veces que ha reído sin mí,
ordena por orden alfabético los hombres de su vida,
dobla mi ego mientras la escucho
hasta que decido abandonarlo,
lo recoge con asco,
y lo lanza lejos de mi vista.

“No lo necesitas.” Dice.
“Yo diré cuándo y cómo sos guapo.” Y ríe.

Y su risa a pesar de todo
es lo mejor que me ha pasado
en esta última década.

- “Diez años tarde, hijo de puta.
Pudimos haber sido tan felices.”

Leyes y delitos naturales

By Manuel Padilla Luna

Así son las leyes y los delitos naturales,
la niñez vuelve a dolernos,
cuando la muerte se apunta alguien querido
como una fecha cualquiera en un almanaque,
y nos cae la congoja y el destino,
el presagio y el naufragio,
el amor empaquetado en el ladrido flaco de los perros.

Así son las cosas,
cartas sobre el escritorio,
fotografías,
líneas desesperadas,
el intento por despegar tu imagen del espejo,
dejar atrás los cuadros
si en esos paisajes no se encuentra calma.

Las cosas crecen,
los nombres se convierten en manchas,
niegan la simetría y el ritmo,
el melancólico instante,
el transcurso de los hechos,
los acostumbrados procedimientos,
de adentro hacia afuera,
el azar, el presagio o el naufragio,
simples datos para los registros.

Así son las leyes y delitos naturales,
ya ni siquiera cuando entramos en el sueño
nuestros muertos se acercan,
las pisadas mienten,
se rinden ante las cosas
que niegan el orden y las jerarquías,
desde hace cuánto no sé;
mis huellas son del otro
que sobrevive en mis pisadas;

todo lo mío es menos elocuente.

Así son las leyes y los delitos naturales,
creo que el destino sería capaz
de condenar a un niño con mi paternidad,
iniciar su cuenta regresiva,
arrinconarme entre la impotencia, su ser y el mar,
ajeno a las verdades que se levantan,
¿De qué profundidad vienen los hijos?
Por qué si son algo que otros han dicho
parece nacen repetidos cuando se arrugan,
cuando siguen irremediablemente
la corriente en que zumban las moscas.

Así son las leyes y los crímenes naturales,
No está dentro nuestras facultades decidir
la forma y la fortuna de los vecinos,
la prosperidad de las raíces,
ni siquiera el subsuelo que no sabe distinguir
entre bosque y jardines.

Tríptico: Los niños y la muerte

By Manuel Padilla Luna

I

Mientras los niños crecen
la muerte consiste en estirarse,
encontrar un antídoto a los lunes,
encenderse boca abajo
hasta vernos repletos de piedras y charcos.

Mientras los niños juegan,
y revuelven sus horas con nuestros años,
ya nos habremos quedado sin ojos ni orejas,
al siguiente día la nariz también se habrá ido,
la boca será ocupada por la tierra;
y nadie va a vernos,
sumergidos entre gases y gusanos,
serás abono,
un desastre de hueso y madera,
un silencio del tamaño de tu cuerpo.

Mientras los niños ríen,
dos metros arriba,
dejarán calas,
girasoles,
rosas y hasta malahierba,
con la esperanza de besarte,
o estamparte un escupitajo,
para ellos dios ya está cerrado,
y vos te volvéis un espanto
para quién quiera escarbarte.

II

Mientras los niños crecen,
algunos te seguirán llorando,
por fin entenderás el porque
las cebollas provocan el más puro de los llantos,
unos por el amor extraviado,

otros por miedo a tu regreso;
a tu oficio subterráneo,
de volver en leyendas,
desde abajo soplarás
y levantarás sábanas
recorrerás el espinazo de quienes te enterraron
como un cienpiés que colecciona almas.

Los niños seguirán como si nada,
rodeándose de amigos y fantasmas,
probando mujeres y tragos,
y vos desde el subsuelo
cada vez más fuerte,
más generoso,
limpio de mentiras y de infamias,
como un guerrero sin errores,
un héroe de la paz,
desearás hundirte cada vez más en la tierra,
en tu raíz oscura y desolada.

III

Si me vieran los niños ahora;
¿Para esto viví?
¿Para esto presté mis brazos, mis piernas,
mi rostro?
¿Para esto pagué por adelantado
un hueco en el cementerio?
¿Para esto soporté
que me exprimieran los ojos noche tras noche
en el temblor oscuro de mi cama?
No era que iba a descender transparente
y alejarme de toda náusea.

Para esto dejé a mi madre,
hundida en su vejez,
sin dolor y sin lástima,
herida por mi muerte y el resto de su vida.

¿Para esto morí?
¿Para reventar a dios,
darle carne al alma,
al agua,
a los aguaceros?

¿Por qué me siguen molestando con campanas?
Mi casa sigue sola,
como un pozo seco
y su raíz está en ruinas.

Ojalá pudieran verme,
es vano llorar,
vano golpearle las paredes a Dios,
arrancarse el pelo y la camisa,
nadie escucha, nadie te mira.

Nadie vuelve.
Nadie retorna
y el polvo de oro de la vida,
es una araña torpe
enredada en su propia tela.

Ritual

By Murvin Andino Jiménez

Un hombre acude limpio a su ritual de muerte.
El marinero que peleó alto en las batallas de la vida
cumple su promesa de la eternidad
y asiste a su angosta marcha en la península infinita de la noche.
Allí la luz resiste leve en los reflejos,
se acoge el fuego primitivo de los dioses,
se resuelven los barcos nómadas de la lluvia
y la antigua espuma plena
que nos fue negando la memoria.
El mar abraza todo,
el hombre se divide en estaciones y tragedias.
El agua inagotable obliga al vértigo común del horizonte.
Todas las islas son sagradas.
La distancia aclama un cuerpo
que se afianza inerme al infinito.
El hombre que anduvo la sangre última
y acortó los caminos eclipsados de la infancia violenta,
dobla su figura de ardor y fiebre para consagrarse,
se destierra al miedo
desde esa tormenta de tiempo y viento que silencia la vida.
Concluye el fuego milenario,
el pertinaz incendio anuncia el vuelo letal del albatros,
los átomos dispersos que invadieron la semilla final.

El otro mineral

By Murvin Andino Jiménez

Bajo las sombras de la costa violenta,
anclado a las cenizas de la eternidad,
el mineral crece aún encadenado a su marítimo engaño.
Anegado por el sórdido murmullo,
casi infame en su estigma inmaterial,
cumple el ciclo de lo inalterable,
su último eslabón de fuego y de ceniza
que fundió la tierra en su amargo frenesí.
En lo profundo, híbrido molecular de las estrellas,
gestando tempestades y diafragmas,
el otro animal náutico se aglomera
y todos los mares claman, las islas vuelven de su ciclo imaginario,
los barcos tristes de la madrugada se renuevan
con el viento estacional desde ese faro paralelo,
que reclama la furia.
Nada es secreto.
El agua viva escarba en la memoria
y como un pez herido, el hombre nada en su abandono,
destruye la voz de su inocencia,
la cúspide maligna de su nombre.
Ciudades infinitas e inconclusas,
melancólicas vitrinas de agonía,
terrazas infinitas donde el mineral se desvanece.

La voz olvidada

By Murvin Andino Jiménez

La noche avanza desde la bahía/ desvaneciendo plumas y bronces/ la noche viene como un animal marino/ y se hunde bajo la quilla de las goletas... Nelson Merren

Noche atemporal,
millones de gotas te doblaron,
cientos de olas te cegaron.
Arena noctámbula,
impenetrable muralla
de viejas y grises soledades.
Playa fugitiva
de otros mares y otros sueños,
de amores cósmicos y cadenciosos
que legaron su letargo.
Noche de estrépito y ternura
que domina con su manto
el imposible vendaval de la condena.
Recorrer esta playa
es tocar entrañas y caminos
de amantes fascinados,
volar despacio sobre cada falaz artefacto de la fe.
Persuadirnos como si el viento fuese una bandera ciega
refugiándose en el tiempo.
Vagar cada noche en sueños
y en penumbras por esa doble orilla de la vida,
junto a este mar devorador de hombres,
de barcos,
de cenizas,
de canciones infinitas,
contra ese diurno estrépito urbano.
Suicidas impulsivos lograron despedirse
y el cíclope invertido alcanzó a sangrar las estaciones,
la angustia,
y el animal pedestre ahogó la ternura,

la pequeña coraza consternada e inolvidable.

Antioración

By Pedro Arturo Estrada

Que la vida me agarre confesado
boca arriba del miedo
aleteando en el azul

Una sola canción
una palabra sola
—dioses desconocidos
cantaré para vosotros

No pido ningún cielo
No ignoro vuestro infierno

Solo este instante es mío
No lo carguéis de eternidad

Dejadme ir cuando quiera
No me atéis
No pidáis mi fidelidad

—Mi fe última

Esa apenas me alcanza
para el día.

Silencioso Horror

By Pedro Arturo Estrada

De los días que uno tras otro
no fueron la vida
—que estuvo siempre en otra parte

Del camino que no elegimos
La dicha que pudo haber sido y desdeñamos

La verdad no vista a tiempo
La mano que no se tendió
y hubiera salvado algo

De la vieja costumbre de creernos a salvo
porque vuelve la luz a los ojos abiertos
mientras duerme lo informe bajo techo

Rostro del horror escondido en la belleza
—La misma luz de lo amado.

Permanencia

By Pedro Arturo Estrada

Permanecerá sólo la devastación
La pesadez del cielo
en la pupila fría

De la tierra ascenderá entonces
el reclamo de lo muerto
La lengua del fuego imprecando
la masacre de los delfines
el desuello vivo de los pequeños
habitantes del bosque
la tortura del aire y del agua
cuyas voces ya habrán gritado
su sentencia inapelable

Permanecerá sólo la cuenca ávida del desierto
El vuelo rasante de la hoz
sobre los trigales del universo

Y en el fondo de todo la memoria
de unos dedos a cuyo roce
hubieran girado de otro modo
los goznes de la realidad

Las yemas de esa penélope del sueño
tejiendo y destejiendo una imposible
—belleza.

Original Apologies

By Lydia Nyachiro Kasese

There is a tired silence between my father and I as we ride home from work.

Tired as in: all that has been said has been said.

Tired as in: all that has been said has somehow always hurt.

Tired as in: all possible apologies have already been used on other people.

So we ride on home in a silence we both use as an excuse for our lack of original apologies.

Letter to Harriet

By Lind Grant-Oyeye

It's midnight yet again
Once again we stare out dark windows
Feel the wet towel tied around
our pupils almost closed.
We drink once again from old gourds
Old tales by moon lit deserted streets

Sometimes we wish we could become
one with the moon, its triumph in the night.
Our thirsty tongues stick out in supplication
reach out to be feted by pitted seeds tied
to sour grapes and fettered moonlight dreams
we yearn one more time for drum beats
in brittle bones.

Glossary: Harriet Tubman

It Is So Painful

By M Baraka Kagira-Kargbo

It is so painful to hear about West Gate Mall attack.
It is so painful to hear some people lost their lives.
It is so painful to hear many others were injured.
It is so painful to hear people lost their relatives.

It is so painful to hear my mother lost a friend.
It is so painful to hear our President lost relatives.
It is so painful to hear so many injured people were taken to hospitals.
It is so painful to hear some of my classmates and schoolmates were held hostage.

It is so painful to hear my classmate saw his cousin shot to death.

If it wasn't for the cruel, evil Al Shabaab, none of these people would have died.
If it wasn't for the cruel, evil Al Shabaab none of these injured people would have suffered in hospitals.
If it wasn't for the cruel, evil Al Shabaab many people would still be enjoying shopping at the West Gate Mall.

If it wasn't for the cruel, evil Al Shabaab not so much property would have been lost.
My dear reader God should change these terrible Al Shabaab to be caring and loving.
Then the Al Shabaab would stop killing, injuring and destroying property.

fat fish jumping

By archie swanson

the musicians are playing
a voice is wailing
we are singing
we are weeping
we are happy
our hearts are blistered
we are dancing
our tears dry
our feet pounding
on red cracked earth
we are clapping
orphan stomachs distended
we are dreaming
green maize with golden kernels
contented
fat fish jumping in blue lake malawi
dreaming
we are dreaming

Homeland

By Eniola Olaosebikan

Flowers alluring...

Roses bright and beautiful

Bushes lush...

Valleys verdant

Reeds high...

Seas blue

Oceans wide...

Fountains pure

Nature warm...

People radiant...

I am Africa

Sweet Africa...

The Blessed home.

Sahara Blues XIII

By Vincent Ajise

Darkness has swallowed light and no one
dares to flare its ambience. Tranquility has gone
on a sabbatical. No wayfarer knows its destination.
Chained to our present are
conundrums of coils. No one can find a sledge.
Tonight, i stand under this
aged hut listening to notes of dirges blaring forth from
the larynx of forlorn
villages. Dirges that pierces the sereneness of Liberia as
bat-disease sacrifices
flesh of mortals to earth's nudity. Dirges from babes of
Uganda who were forced
to eat tears and mucus from their organelles at the behest
of indurate skivvies.
Dirges that echo from the Nigerian goddess of feminism as
men tying turbans
find utility in geometries of teenagers. Dirges resonating from the
innocence of
souls sacrificed to mermaids dwelling in the Congolese waters.
Dirges from the hopes of
Kenyans that were made to kiss the dust by bombs defecated
by al-shabab. Dirges from
the corpse of civilization as the god of war now defiles
Cairo's sublime ancestry
with riddles of woes. Dirges from the stomach of
lads in Somalia whose
stomachs have been butchered by
knives
of hunger. Dirges pervading
from the
boulevards of Durban, where
blood of
black foreigners were
sprinkled on

Dirges

the

Sudan

the shrine of prejudice.

written on the faces of

populace in South

whose independence

procreated civil war.

Can we say our sod,

Sahara, is a port for

solace? Can we

beat our chest

that elegies

meanders

not in the

offing?

Can

we?

Beloved Afrika

By Kariuki wa Nyamu

My beloved Afrika, our
Afrika. Our splendid mother of Ages,
Afrika whose majesty dwells inside of me, how
matchless you are of all races! A mast of friendliness
and love; Afrika of spirited dances on the mound. Afrika
of idyllic
hilarity and generosity. Your love for life that flows in us;
will forever erupt
a well of joy in our yard. My Afrika, our Afrika, our mother
of Compassion, though
you've been ransacked, gashed and raped! We pay
apologies to you, as we vow
to defend you, we deeply appreciate God for moulding
Mama Afrika, thus
we pray that all days, your scenic face shall forever
remain a living
testament of fortitude, hope and opulence. My
beloved
Afrika, I shall ceaselessly sing for you,
songs
pregnant with optimism and redemption,
as I vow to do anything for you. If
war erupts, I'll fight for you to death.
If you need my prayers, I'll put on
tatters, fast and beseech God for
you,
because you're ever my pride.
Beloved Afrika, Our Mother of
Grace, today, I just want to
let you know that you're
way out of the ordinary,
The most stunning of
beauties! Since you're
outstandingly the most
revered race of races!

thus you deserve all
credit for ages
and ages!

Love In Four Stanzas

By Kariuki wa Nyamu

Love
is an
incre-
dibly
hypo-
thetical
thought
‘Tis tolerantly bigoted, bold,
proud, charming yet hurting!

Love is a
peril of giving an’
getting. ‘Tis loud
silence. A bitter-
sweet pill. A
set of delusions,
thus ‘Tis awfully
jealous and
contagious!

Love is a
mustard seed,
Tiny but
fruitful, once
given time,
thus it buds
petals of bliss
and perplexity!

Love is an enigma, that’ll in no
way be unraveled; For you utter-
ly love
one
who loves

you not! Love is heart's ailment,
it scratches the aged, pricks teens,
stabs the
lustful,

smolders

cheats, electrocutes adulterers and
energizes faithful into completion.

Love letters III

By Olisaemeka Gerald Njoku

Gerald:

Nuella, to think of you now
i hate.

You, whose name was once a harmonica on my lips
for you are poison,
fuelling my grudge in the background
where our delicate harpsichords hatch.

So i'll clutch this hurt heart
to this chastened chest
and to healing nurse it
forgo it to fallow into fertility
frantic for a fresh foray.

Nuella:

To believe human love endures for all time is an illusion
I followed my heart once,
But who is to say i should always do so?
Once you told me that a woman is somewhat like a child,
That she is ever curious.
So isn't it expected of me to flirt with candies at the mall?

Au revoir!

Untitled

By Ali Znaidi

seeing a rainbow out the windowpane
walking across her boudoir in this carnivalesque morning
a spectrum of visible colours arching onwards
according to a tempo set by temptation
the withered flowers and rusty fences
of the garden are now under new setting parameters,
a palimpsest
in this morning the garden sounds very colourful,
although it has no tradition of emitting colours
one just cares for that woman's survival
as champagne begins to leak from her glossy lips

Conflicting Rationalities

By Cosmas Tinashe Shoko

It is conflicting rationalities save a falling plane or perish in a
deadly crush,
The beginning of an end; good memories reflected upon,
In love and in war, in fairness we embraced one another,
One neither is perfect nor saint; we have all fallen short of the
glory of God,
The storm is strong; I feel this time the flood will wash us away,
Stuck between a hard surface and a rock,
Hurt to the bone, the lover of my life has cheated me again!
What ought to be?
None knows where we are going, a detour approaching ahead.

Like a ghost roaming in the park, my heart throbs as sweat drizzle
off my face,
Beating so fast I cry my lover has left me in tatters,
Mind shuttering, seeing stars in broad day light,
A cheater is always a cheater, forgive not, I would not dare;
Cry my love; cry it is the end of us,
Move on, I move, love hurts,
Save my marriage for the children, I ponder and wonder—
It is conflicting rationalities, another go or move on,
Broken hearted, lost in the wilderness, meandering in deep
thoughts.

Emma The Jewish Girl

By Jackson T. Matimba

This gal
Is so regal,
She has traces
Of many races,
She is slim
Like her mother a Muslim,
She is elite
Like Cousin Sarah the Israelite,
Her eyeballs are pristine
Like those of a Palestine,
Her waist is lean
Like Mary`s, the Galilean,
Emma`s eye embody a mist
Like those of an Islamist,
For my love to be legal I wish
I was Jewish

She has traces
Of many, many, races
She got her long thigh
From Auntie Nelly the beautiful Thai
Her skin is tan
Like her grandmother of Pakistan,
Emma`s hair is stylish
Like that of an English,
Yet it is tinted reddish
Like the curls of a Swedish,
She smiles with a little panic
Like her godmother the Hispanic,
O Lord I wish
I was Jewish

Her bum,
As big as an album
It is pilgrimage,

The beauty of her image
When first we met,
I thought she was a comet
She is bonny-
Her skin radiant like ebony,
Slowly I saw her arose
Into a beautiful rose,
The blue eyed Emma;
Has put me at a dilemma-
That for my courtship to be legal-
I much wish
I was Jewish

She has the fairest traces
Of many, many races,
Her curves are rare
Like her ancestors of Harare,
Emma smiles like an alien
When she giggles is an Italian,
She has perfect knees
Like those of a Japanese,
Her gait is fragile
Yet definitely sufficiently agile,
In her eye are tiny droplets as dew
Like those of a feminine Jew,
Yet my romantic situation to be legal
I wish
I was Jewish

She is full of romance
Like her stepsister Romans
Emma of the first sign Aries
Meaning love without boundaries
Such love as fiery as to burn
Matching her locks long and auburn
A look fairly spicy
And eyes never icy
Of these she is gifted

Like burdens never lifted
My heart is full of pleas
Much wishing her to please
She always wears a beautiful cloak
Throughout all the hours of the clock
Always without pretence
Free is her smile and never tense
Longingly I wish
That I was Jewish

Racial margins I loath
Much as to make an oath
When our feelings are dual
And our hearts faster than gradual
Before sunrise I hasten to engrave
All my love on her heart's grave
Pertinent issues I fail to overwhelm
Nor sit upon the situation's helm-
She is truly slim
Like a fasting Muslim
She is virtuously elite
Like the biblical Israelite
She has so many traces
Of as many, many, races
Yet for my love to be legal
In faith I wish
That I was Jewish

rpm (rhetorical paradoxi-metaphorisis)

By Abdulrahman M. Abu-yaman

scleras, snow white
pupils, dilated.

brain box, sparking
incandescently. he asks

the physician: ‘tell me doctor,
what’s my malady?’ stares at

his sloppy zig-zag manuscript
and replies ‘rpm’. not comprehending,

he utters, ‘excuse me?’, physician expatiates:
‘rhetorical paradoxi-metaphorisis, a rare

cerebral disorder in which the forebrain
“wordyfactures” weird grandiloquent and

aesthetic phrases and clauses sub-
consciously, using unconventional axioms.’

‘any cure?’, patient inquires. ‘not that
i know of’ was the response. ‘doctor, is

this a gift or a curse?’, still inquisitive.
‘that depends on your usage’ he replies

Do you know about *Illicit*?

By Delia Watterson

This is all about *illicit*; the unfit, inappropriate, unsuitable, unseemly, unbecoming, improper, unlawful, illegal, *illicit*.

Illicit they say fucks around;
with nouns and pronouns,
but no, they are all unfit for *illicit*.

Verbiage that is sometimes vibrating with inappropriate, because its *illicit*.

Illicit has often been made to feel wrong, singular, that *illicit* just doesn't belong.

Unsuitable- that's what they say it is to be *illicit*.

You could say that *illicit* is unseemly or unbecoming;

Like big glasses and curly hair cut short like a boy on a girl kind of unbecoming, but that's *illicit*.

Those that have seen *illicit*; sometimes think *illicit* is dirty even at times easy, but that's not *illicit*.

At times like these; *Illicit* becomes its unlawful self; which is not good, but more or less *illicit*.

Improper as usual, *illicit* wants to say whatever it feels like; to share everything, to keep not much secret, like rude staring, that's so *illicit*.

Sometimes alerting people to how *illicit* is unsuitable to be *illicit*.

Illicit met a waiter a couple of years back; called cracked innocence, he made *illicit* feel reminiscent about that long ago feeling- cracked innocence, how *illicit* was, and how it all is now, now that it is *illicit*.

Yes it is *illicit* but *illicit* is not twisted, or mad.

Do you see Illicit?

Illicit's idea, which is so *illicit* it makes you feel unsuitable, inappropriate, improper, unbecoming, unseemly and unfit.

That's *illicit*, experimenting with its illicitness.... this *illicit*, that is *illicit*.

Still not?

Even though you think you know *illicit* - *illicit* is still somehow not *illicit*.

Illicit is a rule breaker, a law bender, but also unsuitable, inappropriate, unfit, unbecoming, unseemly and improper to be called *illicit*.

That's what it means to know *Illicit*.

In Quarantine

By Crystal Warren

I try to write, to tell my story,
to trace the paths I took.
But I am no archivist, not much is preserved.

What am I left to say of my life?
It was the day before - when I was thirteen,
once upon a time - in the beginning...

The past is another world, shadows
remembered in a dream - fragments,
photographs - headstones - relics.

The wall of words - a child can climb it.
We all escape - but few return.
Silence covers a past in quarantine.

As The World Turns

By Crystal Warren

Turning
turning
turning

spinning
faster

out of control

edges blur

a blaze of colour

then
darkness

and
the
world
keeps
turning

The Music

By Kelechukwu Ezeigwe

Me, the music thriiiils
It fills my soul and driiiills my body
You, you sway slow slow
The rhythm of your waist keeps the sacredness
Me, listen to the sound blend with the
Leaves rustling outside, with the whistling breeze
You, your moves fiills my appetite
You glitter tonight like the lights in the ceiling
Red, yellow, green, pink
Gay and radiant
You are slippery like the Egyptian muse of dance
Me, I can see the lights sparkling in my world
I can hear the muse whisper moves
Moves only the serpent savours
The moves that lies in the soul of music
You, this moment grilllllls
This hour is tranquilllll
Heavy with seductive fervour
What is your power you lover of the unknown
Me, pick the night dusts, inhale the scent
Grasp the air, twist it, burst it, spread the content
Drink the tranquility, strip the rhythm
Rape the music, worship the sound
Revere the sacredness, curse the beast, curse your soul
You, I can do nothing
This sound overwhelms me
This moment lingers mysterious
What I see is a man swaying like a goddess
Like Eve
Me, the power lies in the mystery
The mystery in the music
The music is in the soul
The mystery is for the man alone who sways
Rough and mild, sweet and bitter
Sleek and fierce like a woman

Crowned with twelve stars

Like the man who drinks from

The stream of femininity

The Cemetery Letter To A Gone Soldier

By Kelechukwu Ezeigwe

Dearest Cole

This letter might have been blown away a thousand mile from your graveside. It may have been stamped endlessly by melancholic mourners, ripping the inky words apart, now buried with wilted dusty leaves scattered over the cemetery ground. But they are written also in the carven of my heart where you can read them over and over again if only you would come home. Its twenty years gone already you left, an agile eagle to hunt down enemy prey daubed by a warriors scent. I wished you well, your cheeks clasped between my hands and you kissed me goodbye to return when this gory is over. You have stayed too long fighting this war of doom. You have tarried too long for this haunting nightmare of you alone in that vast field of fallen warriors blinded by fogs of death. The door screeches, I look out for you but only your footprints trailing the endless narrow soil of doom grazes my sight. Return home Cole, the backyard hibiscus are wilting. Every day I sit before Mary's grotto praying endless chaplet from the fall you left till this moment your absence have lingered for so long. Return home Cole, your nostalgic scent is slithering away from my memory. Return home Cole, this little candles we lighted to burn away your absence are already thick wax of dusts caked in a rusted chandelier. Return home Cole now that these words are still written on the tablet of my heart. Alas dearest Cole if you ever come home when this heart is all frail and withered, when this flowers have withered away, then sit before this closing day and think of me as déjà vu.

Men unfit for Mankind

By NuBlaccSoUl

I met my mother's biological father, my 'grandfather', at his funeral.

Foul feelings, petty and futile.

Killer-stare, I look corpses dead in the eye.

So I, shut his sight- lid the iris; blind the guy.

[I've got issues, you need to subscribe. Can't just kind-of-buy.]

But no disrespect to the departed, I came to bid a good bye.

Or maybe that's a lie.

I buried my hand deep in his casket for a handshake.

But the unawake, unaware of my extended greetings

Cannot reach out.

This is awkward for me, at celebration of a life I never knew.

A human I never loved.

New family,

Folk I need to find familiar fields with.

A couple of assets left-

Liquor store and a taxi business-

Varying facets.

And like a loan we interested,

Never resisted a reunion, guess we are bound together as a union.

Your widowing wife's children introduce themselves

To your other, other, other offspring that you left to collect dust on the shelves.

How often babies are left paternal-parent orphan is why June 19 is coffin.

You were Mr Misappropriation-Of-Trust.

Our Sovereign Lord speaks, in whispers, of giving forgiveness

Even when and where it was never requested.

The gospel youth is that, the dirt will return to the earth.

Men show each other the men's restroom, I never saw you at the urinal.

But back to the burial.

The Doves' services hearse driving your body to the cemetery,
your last home.

I hope the lion's gates swallow you whole; find an angel that's
your greater half like bettered bilateral symmetry, even I would
hate to see you afterlife live alone.

Consider this my flowers on your tombstone, as you push daisies
in the gardens.

The white flag is burning not waving.

By NuBlaccSoUl

Fierce.

Frustrated.

Fuming.

Traitors ringed 'round the neck.

Fight.

Fires.

Forcefully.

To the hell we are all bound anyway.

Police pointing pistols at the people.

Mob justice pacts to counterattack the courts' injustices.

Politicians always half-listening, keen to speak, but are never really hearing us.

Nobody is laughing Mr Government!

Tarnish the tarmac to break new grounds; now roads appear for the low-lives.

We will thrust our poor bodies for the richer good of our highly valued children.

We will penetrate your barricades, because we have all the powers – supposedly.

Our spiritual wills will allow us not to cease until we are all free, financially.

It Starts with a Spark

By JoPro Blog

The lighting of a simple match and then the flick of sulphur,
Look now students, quickly, as the flames they soon engulf her.
A piece of higher learning's history, now reduced to smoke,
Is this the revolution though, of which uTata spoke?

As the pyre starts to burn, the smoke it fills the air,
Who'd have said that melatonin would be our cross to bear?
UCT's on fire now, the discourse ever callous.
"Fuck White People", "Kill All Whites" is common T-shirt
malice.

I speak to whites: they're up in arms, their varsity is crumbling.
They stare and point and shake their heads and all I hear is
mumbling.
UCT, a formerly world-class learning institution,
Is now immersed in crime and flames: the students' revolution.

"We've had enough, this varsity, it should belong to all.
But everyday it's 'transformation', 'hashtag Rhodes Must Fall'.
This is all we ever hear and we just want to learn,
Pass the year and drinks at Tiger, that's my main concern."

"We said we're sorry, twenty years has come and gone so fast,
Please can we just leave our dirty laundry in the past?
Blame the government you voted, they have let you down,
It's so unfair to impose this: a UCT shutdown."

I speak to blacks: they're up in arms, their varsity is crumbling.
They tell of townships, paraffin lamps and all their stories:
humbling.
UCT, the prospects of a world-class institution,
Hasn't delivered its promises and there's fuck-all retribution.

"My shack is here to stay," they say, "My loo, it isn't leaving",
"I'm going to burn this painting but you ask what I'm achieving?"

It's about my rights, you see, as a disenfranchised black.
You hit me with systemic oppression – now I'm gonna hit you
back.”

“You say that I'm a criminal; need bullets in my head.
But without education man, I might as well be dead.
What about the history though? And what about tradition?
This is not my story Boer, I can't even pay admission.”

Right or wrong is ours to muse, who will reign the victor?
Whichever side you tend to err, the students they have picked her.
Flames begin to lick her face, her frame lessens to ashes.
Symbolic of our nation's wounds: now agonizing gashes.

The lighting of a simple match and then the flick of sulphur,
More than just a fire: inequality has engulfed her.
A canvas of our nation's history, now reduced to embers,
This, our legacy of apartheid: a nation that remembers.

I Run

By Khaya Ronkainen

Death on air
Death on sea
Death on land
I run
Clouds raining bullets
Water sinking boats
Natives waving blades
I run
Rivers into blood
Numbers floating
Stomach touching back
I run
“Love thy neighbour
Brothers and sisters
Welcome!” They say
I run
For year after year
Numbers buried
None convicted
I run
Around the globe
South to North
Till the end
I run
“What are you after?”
“A job,” I say
“Whose job?” They ask
I run
Words burning
Thirsty with despair
North to South
I run
Not for refuge
But to dissolve
Into earth brown

As my face, *I run*.

Forgetting

By Nabeela Bhabha

Three years ago I learned to tell the truth.
It was a Saturday afternoon,
body burning into oblivion in front of the bedroom mirror
a thousand miniscule things I could not say to you – I said them to
myself.

I said; you are a liar, whose tongue runs along the pavement
outside, dirt sticking to its eyes
and it tastes like everything you've ever said to me.

But wait. You are not here.
Another lie, you have never left
you are beneath my bed before I can fall asleep- but I don't sleep.
Looming through the shadows of my kitchen cabinets like an expiry
date faded into the wooden shelves,
and it's no wonder everything tastes bitter.

Somewhere on the murals painted on my ceiling, your name is
still there under its glow

- I do not stare at my ceiling anymore
but sometimes the roof shakes and the dust floats down like a
warning to a typhoon

and I know you have come to remind me.

I look at the mirror and say; you are telling the truth
but there is no reflection- just an empty lounge drawn thick with
the black of your eyelashes
and the sturdy movements of your hands across my neck like a ship
reaching shore,
like the elephant at a watering hole, like steal against rubber,
like the buzzing of the bees as they reach their hive, they know they
have come home.

Home- lanterned by the strobe lights of the dying sun as the
moon rises,
to whom does the sky belong?

I live alone.

My friends say I need more friends, they don't understand
I have piles in my basement like a flood holding this house up,
or maybe this house holds the flood down

all I know is I've been floating for years now.
Sometimes the current carries me away from land and all there is, is
water.

Water- climbing the stairs of my basement, spilling out of the
sockets on the walls
the walls cry; so I sit with them and say don't worry,
tomorrow I will cover your cracks with red, green, and purple,
violet, gold and pearl,
I will colour you like the bruises on the back of my skull,
no one will know they're there.

Three years ago I stopped lying.
And now I sketch the lines of your skin all over the drains, her
throat pushing heavier
the weight of the dead that refuse to leave,
dragging them by their gaping mouths, out to the ocean where they
can haunt without drowning,
among themselves like a castle of grotesque triangles pulling down
stray boats and unanchored ships,
opening its arms to the falling planes like a mother to her unborn
child.

I'm not a liar anymore
I don't say things like tomorrow.

Every bit of dust and air

By Abigail George

These are things that make
Me happy. The stars brightness
Turn in the air. Dandelions.
Reading Hemingway. The pouring
Rain. A switched off television.
The magical life of writing.
This is a fist and it keeps on coming.
Whenever lions roared marking
Their territory. If I knew you
I would keep you safe. I would
Have kept you away from the
Rough galaxy from the time you were
Born. This poem is in memory
Of Kevin Carter. If I had known
You I would have liked your view
On things. I write about the song
In the wind, and when I am inside
The white blinding vision of the seasons
Moral compass, I am most alive!

The things that make me sad.
The magical life of writing.
The fact that xenophobia is in need
Of a psychiatrist. This is meat
Country and we are all in need of it.
Navigating through the dark
Of global warning. Pollution.
The footprint of climate change.
Men who love the company of other
Men, cigarettes, single malt whiskies,
And stories. I can't live. I can't
Live without you. I can't live with you
My lonely heart. My silent voice.
My lonely, hungry, searching heart.
Scratching echoes through the night.

The thin rain can't mask my
Loneliness, but my heart can.
Why did ancient woman not
Think of mapping out the sea?

The struggle for creativity in Africa

By Abigail George

My Virginia Woolf
in disguise. My veil, my apprentice,
shaman, owl wise. I see Jean
Rhys's ghost in-intervals.
Joyce Carol Oates's hands,
and rouge. Windows to her soul.
Bessie Head. Wishing on the
poetry of Athol Williams.
Rapture. Oh, rapture. The blush
Of rapture. There was
Plath's lipstick. The milk,
the buttered bread, Ariel.

Gas. Gas. Gas and stamps.
Updike's father's tears.
A child's eyes can see the
worm. Dambudzo Marechera's jaded pain.
Biko. Daddy's painted drum.
Let the dishes rot-into-nothing.
Hemingway's earth does not
waste-anything-in-the-end.
The cornfields of Illinois are pretty
where David Foster Wallace
grew up. His childhood
was made up of bonfire

anecdotes. Shark teeth
and infinite jest. He was
the pale king. The so-called
psychotic bewitched by
libraries. By the halls of Amherst.
The big Midwest where
of-all-things genocide took
place. Murder and speeches.

His dream songs. They
came from space. He gripped
his pen. Left behind an alphabet.
A map of supernova writing.

A Little Harder

By Paul Sezzie

It is different now
The sun is gone
Behind the Mungolo hills
The sun that burned our skin
The sun that warmed us
Has gone to sleep

Now
For me to see your smile
I must look a little harder
For me to feel your love
I must use a blind man's cane
For me to be heard, my king
I must shout a little louder
For me to feel your presence
I must push myself to you
A little harder

Will the sun ever come again?
To burn us?
To warm us?

My Eternal

—*for Soo-mi*

By Ehi'zogie Iyeomoan

Every dawn that wears the colour of the sun
a flower blooms and blossoms
whether there be dewdrops
or lack of it

At noon the sky is a multicoloured butterfly
of an unbroken smile, constant
there be storms or showers
or lack of it

At dusk—at night a satellite stays glued to the heavens
whether there be twinkling stars,
a luminous moon
or lack of it

And you ¹⁶*nae yeoja* are all of these:
tripartite magic of: a blooming flower, a multicoloured butterfly
and a satellite star
your beauty constant as the sky, your smile unbroken—
evergreen,
you bloom and blossom eternal as the heavens

¹⁶ Korean words translated 'my woman' in English

A lullaby for Matshidiso

By Thabo Mooke

We knew each other well
She of the beauty of a mystical goddess of Africa
While we the mortals remained trapped
In our earthly insignificancies
Matshidiso was all the time in motion
Soaring freely like a bird up the blue skies
He face added glamour to any social episode
Her secret admirers regarded Matshidiso with trepidation
Like she was an African wild fig
But the opulent and valiant delighted in the bed Matshidiso slept
on
‘Tshidi’, as she was known with passion and envy by friends and
aficionados
Had no purpose for her hands
Since her voluptuous body
Ferociously magnetised both paper and mint
It was on a Sunday morning
And the narrow beams of the sun
Were smiling upon the earth
When I drew the curtains of my window
The little bird on my window seal
Was sagged in deep forlornness
And had ceased to sing like it did for many moons
A small group of residents, friends and foes
Was gathered on the dusty street of my neighbourhood
Friends, their faces distorted in anguish
Foes, their faces copiously masked in sardonic glee
Already formulating gossip and disparage
‘The slut is now a fatality’
Her beautiful body sprawled out lifelessly like a ruler
On the dusty street of my neighbourhood
And gathering a film of dust
While flies intoning
In an orchestra of cacophony over her body

A neurotic secret admirer had pounced on her
And the shining blade of his knife was inserted deep into
Matshidiso's heart
And Matshidiso was no more

Beyond Condomonium

By Wanjohi Wa Makokha (Kenya)

BOOK I

Woman Beauty of Hospitals Woman

The Woman. The beauty of hospitals and the squeaking doors of elevated cleanliest of floors. There are TVs that speak silence in black quietude.

They mirror the poise of lines of those seeking Hippocratic consultations. There are scents of laboratory liquids that permeate the nostrils of those here.

Their fragrance reminds of the blatant misuse of noses of all shapes. There are these all, like lines of queues of who is who in the medical almanac of tropical maladies.

And then there is the woman. Sure.

She sits next to him picking tweets on the slender tool she uses for personal communication. A Samsung.

She sits picking blogs of snippets that fell as narratives from the Youtube that is choruses of pain. The sick.

She sits with legs so folded, arms twitching at triceptal angles instigating bravery into her fine soul of steel. Courage.

She sits with jeans occupying the cold leather of rainy Thursday occupying her bespectacled eyes with alphabets of Europe and Asia. Interlocuted interloper. Dope.

She sits with her elbow dancing on the cages of the ribs. Of the man next to her. Who winces Influenza like the wheeze off the thorax of her man minus his inhaler. Abomination.

She sits and eats off the oxygen of here, her aquiline nostrils imitating Kagame's when he smells the whispers from Bujumbura while conducting yoga. Twitches.

He reads his newspaper spot of Obituaries. Sailing with sadness into the catatonic miasma that is convalescence. Redemption.

Christ shall suffer like poetic stanzas in the fidgety fingers of Lesego Rampolokeng, when both are invoked in tandem like two in the tango of Congoan lingala! C'est oui!

They shall sit like that for whiles of million pentaseconds, quaking the hours of their unspoken pain into the agenda of the medical man. Healing.

Next shall beget next next next next next die Naechste bitte, s'il vous plait. They shall plait cornrows of next next next buttocks wiping waiting benches. Patience.

They shall do so and go.....

14th February, 2016 11.35pm

BOOK II

Woman Leaves of Tea Woman

The tea pot. The scent of brewed tea leaves lingers on.

It wafts through the trout of the stainless steel kettle in spirals of shimmering and disappearing grey. The scent is powerful.

It invades the nose with strength pushing away oxygen to take charge. The sugar granules resemble pieces of a full moon ground to a fine powder of mirror-like nature. In each granule hides the taste of times once sweet and lingering.

Times now sitting away like the clock that hands above the woman. Its hands stuck in a time once gone and now still is. Still the clock tick tocks a sound set in its hidden parts even as the hands of seconds and minutes stay still, caught between lack of energy and the dust of gathered months.

The plate is made in China. It has embroidery both elegant and elaborate. Exquisite to the eye this floral alphabet that attenuates situations like this one that are both incredible and indescribable. The pellets of powerful painkillers place themselves at the distance between the untouched breakfast and the woman.

A mock referee. An arbiter of bitter-sweet phenomenon. An occurrence of hospice nature so harrowing in its simple emplacement that ample is its lack of communication of hope. The woman fidgets to the left.

She holds out to the fingers of air and clasps a fistful of determination. She takes this and rubs it on the place where the pain intense-most is.

Her crotch.

Things will look brighter once the sun of the skies breaks the virginity of this dour day. The morning that clothes itself in attires of

frost shouting seriously though split window panes like a thousand shaitans!

That morning where a mourn emanates from the distant building by the gate. A lost one on the last road to the belly of the earth in a hearse full of misery.

A moan escapes through the unquiet walls of the next room where a child of steep Kwashiokor lies.

In this midst of the very nature of life,

death presents

itself

as a question mark.

[?]

The woman nibs the bread.....

14th February, 2016 11.45pm

BOOK III

#WomanEyeBallWoman....

.....eyeballs. Minus spectacles. Pupils are A okay. The problem lies in the throb.

It does not fade. It does not go.

It is constant. It is dull. It is there.

At the front of the socket.

Yeah where the balls located are. The place where the two enter coitus. The throb.

It throbs. It throbs. It aches.

The pillow adjusts. The back now bent with a kind of ache. The body is in a state of unease. Long after the liquid dripped its very last.

Droplets that measured Time from the skies of mosquito nets

to the very veins that support Life, here. They come and go.

They go and come.

They peer into the luminous light that is a halo before her veiled eyes.

They throb with it. Fading and receding, emerging and arriving.

One sees things in a squarely fashion, rhombus cartoons
zigzagging in

a rotational cuboid that is upside down. The bed creaks
with heavy silence.

The electricity is electricity today.

It is.

There were times when imagined insects scoured the plains
of the ceiling,

acre after acre, hectare after hectare all zwooooooshed into
the coplacutorial berescete

of monsglfligate caopjhdllings. You see we throb in and out.
We throb here and there.

We throb in woman we do so we do.

Woman at the epicenter of penumbra. Dusk-inviting
khangas to flippant choruses of echoes.

Of voices with will against intellectuals ohne Willen. Oui.

We crush into pestles the mortars themselves. Peeping from
broken eyeballs

made of fake China.

The wall that winds its distance.

The wall that whines as it forms a road.

It is on this that an insect finds a journey to itself.

Throbs will sire throbs. Hobbits to elves. Ogres to oysters
upon bays of eloquent

hop step and jumps.

Marina is Brazil and Rio Grande del la Sol too.

Be yours shadow then. Ne.

Be your outlines of the shadow of Nkurumah
in a teaspoon of a schooner.

Float with him Africa! Float float, boat boat.

Throb will be throb when she reclines.

She does

it with agile ease

on a bed

of electric

cure.

Back to you eyeball.....!!!!!!

14th February, 2016

A Love Poetry to Poetry

Edgar Cambaza a.k.a Jorge d'Amizade

Dear poetry, please listen to this verse
come out to your balcony, my princess,
after this long romance I will confess:
you are the center of my universe.
You bring me light when life seems so adverse,
you are my pillar when I am a mess,
because you live in me somehow, I guess.
So, wherever you are, stay in me, immerse.
Please, have as many lovers as you wish
actually, I will always support that,
because you made not to be selfish.
I love novels and short stories... so what?
If you love only one, you will perish,
but you are the first I always look at.

**MIXED GENRES/
GENEROS MIXTOS**

Voices

By Tendai R Mwanaka

Knock: strike a surface noisily to attract attention, collide with, strike, strike, strike someone or something so that they would move, move, move and/or fall. We knock on the doors with bended fingers: knock, knock, knock.... *Gogogoi, may we come in please*; we say as we come into your heath. This is followed by a pause, a pregnant pause, the right pause, waiting for your answer. It's a voice wanting to come out, knocking in, to come in, in, in...

We knock upon silence for an answering voice
What if knocking could answer itself---; knocking

Voices are sounds produced by the person's larynx and blown out through mouth, a speech or song, ability to speak or sing, hmmmm, *do so mi re dot do far mi mi re do...*, the range or pitch or type of tone with which a person sings *uuuuuuuuuu*. It is a voice as speech or song; sing, sing, she sings a storm, dances. There are other voices like grunts *himm*, cries *yuvii*, clucks *tshack*, sighs *uhuuu*, bird's voices, tame that cicada, please! Of the wagging laughter of water in Nyajezi River. Or the sounds of Madasanana creek's water over flat stones, sounds like people talking and laughing, kind of creepy voice. And, it's the voice of Nyangombe River when it is flooded that has the biggest voice...it's a droning voice, little music...it's like anger. These are voices that talks, even a lot louder than voices as speech and song. Anger can talk, too; when we think it is the soul that's talking. Voices are like a stethoscope detecting seismic vibrations, collecting, trigonometrically confusing, and calculating. Talk that calculates, calculates, calculates itself to zero, negatives...

A voice that talks
...are they voices that do not talk. It's not a question! Neither an answer...

We talk upon silence for an answering voice
What if talking could answer itself--- talking

To talk is to speak in order to give information (what of talk that doesn't give information) mumbling, mumbling, rumbling,

rummaging around speech, or to express ideas or feelings, to be able to speak, speak, speak, I shall not speak, a speech, voices, to discuss something thorough. Thoroughly cleaning the classrooms of thought whilst talking, talking, talking, like we used to clean those classrooms at school, aghhh... I am utterly fond of talking, telling. Talk to me, please! He will talk your head off. We need to talk. Well you want to see my back, talk to my back. We want to be silent some other time. Fasting; from talking, silently...

We are silent upon silence for an answering voice
What if silence could answer itself--- silence

Silence as complete lack of sound *mmiii*, voice *shiiii*, speech *mmiii*, talk, a situation in which someone is unwilling to speak, I won't speak of..., discuss something, silences, silencing, silencer... Puutuuuuu... the sounds of the revolver spouting out bullets...it's like her silences to me. It talks. When there is no voice: are we silent: death, die, dead...

Unsettled things scatter around like autumnal leaves in the wind, float, whimsies...

Like sentences coming undone in:
Syllables drifting to the surface
Vowels bowling down to the bottom, bottoming
Consonants constantly going up and down
To the surface of the ocean, off the ocean's surface
Our voices are our father's voices

Our voice is the choice that we are
It is what we want to do, what we do not want to do,
With our lives, with other people's lives.
What do you want to do with me, my life, my lives?
Our voice purposes as a commentary
Our voice is ownership and autonomy
Commentary on Ownership and Autonomy:

Broadcasting (commentary as in sports casting), explaining, expressing; belonging (ownership of one's voice), possession: our own goal (autonomy), own goal. Jam Stap, stamping a ball past Peter

Sch(smile)micheal, self governing Dutch overseas territories into an own goal, that is, Greenland is to Denmark. Manchester United...Man Uuuuuu, late 90s, early 2000s

A voice, in football terms!

Striding past all that all could be

In it we find, invisible forces of new words, invisible
Forces of words that are in a new space, places, times
Not Times Square!

It takes full control over-

Control, controlling, controlled, directing, limiting, regulating.
Managing? Nikki.

Do you believe Nicki Manager; Minaj-ing, is talking the music world into a machine fantasy, is an ocean without water, talking, talking, talking.... On top of this empty ocean cruise ships, like Tom Cruise, a monster ship, titanic, titaniking somewhere in the North Sea, harvesting seaweed for his friend, a girl Katy, Perry?

It's just patterns of language, it creates

A voice that comes from, is

Demanding, pressing, paradoxical

Don't run to the dictionary:

It's a statement that sounds absurd, or seems to contradict, itself.

The dictionary will even contradict you, but may in fact be true; a person or thing that combines contradictory qualities, androgyny. Robert Duncan, on his poetical pedestal, knowing how to take advantage of androgyny and mood swings, saying,*Thus, in actual world, the world as we call it, men "found" or founded signs of God (voices (of)for God), perceived and believed, and in this realized, that this being was all, and that one's own existence was but part among such a multitude, inconceivable, of parts in the universe of that being, coexisting through time and space as Eternity, that self existed only in terms of that Being.*

The real world, the world we know, the world we inhabit,

is God, is us, in our multiplicity,

is the being, is the universe.

Where the hell is hell, then?

Duncan, where the heaven is heaven?

Us? Yet, he is right!

It is the presence of duende
Not Paula duende, in a song, its De Anda?
“Walk away”, “Walk away”, “Walk away.”
Sweetness accruing sweetness, telling you to walk away
From the beauty, from her voice
It’s not easy to walk away from beauty
It’s the inexplicable transfixing
Qualities, evident in her voice, in beauty
That gives us that feeling, chills
Mysterious, profoundly, this feeling?
I can’t even explain it, as you can see!

Are voices there for us to hear what’s not there?
Are voices there for us to hear what’s not there?
Did I repeat myself?
So, where there are no words
Don’t we hear?

Hear me, Lord, Oliver Mtukudzi belting out his plea to the Lord.
It’s Oliver Mtukudzi, Tuku, or Kutu (the thin small or old dog), or
senior Mukosoro (senior cougher), coughing out his plea to the skies,
to his God. To be aware of the sound of the cougher in Tuku with
our ears, to be told about, to listen to, listen to and hear that voice
inside your heart before it dies

Everything dies inside some kind of voice
Different voices respond to knocked-on silences
Knock, knock, knock....

This poem is about voices existing in ever shifting states
Between embodiment and disembodiment
Embodiment, Disembodiment:

Embodiment is to give a physical or visible form to an idea or
quality, like voice, the voice, which is God, becoming flesh in *Jesus* (
I am not talking of my friend, *Ricardo Jesus Felix Rodriguez*), embodying
the word, or voice again, easily into the believers (Christians... I don’t
want to be unfair to *Mohammad*) hearts, include or contain as a part
of a whole. Disembodiment is to separate from body, or existing
without body, coming from a person who cannot be seen. God, the

father, as fire, floods, Us, in resurrection. Noah! Even our Noah's boats, our airy words, our bodies, are frail against the storms of the voice. You are reading me here but you cannot see me. I am disembodied in this text, in these words, in this voice. I didn't say I am dead!

It is a state where the leaf
Flying in the wind says something
It would hear itself
A voice that lets nothing speaks to you
To itself
A voice that lets nothing touches what the story truly says
A voice that lets nothing feels what the story truly means
It is a voice as body, as un(em)body, as text (untext), as sound
((un)sound)
Does it looks like I care you are shaking your head, exasperated
by my ungramaticaleasiness!

We think in words, in voices
Inside us, in languages
In civilizations, in cultures, in knowledges...
In knowledge, and in this voice, compelled by hunger
We leave the cloud of ignorance, which is a cloud of despair.
Flip flop is how our movement sounds
What if all that is here, had not been there
Where an attractive sincere insincerity
Kills the pride of these accomplished things
Does not inspire value to the process

This poem is about how voices emerges out of nothingness
To be nothing, not at all
Can we quantify nothingness?
To have no voice is to talk in the language of nothingness
To create unbeingness in Beingness
This voice, in the unbeing
Is before human
What we see in the sky is a void voice
Before word, that is God
For never can we read the heavenly voice

Before sound
Before Eden
Before the big nothing
Nothingness

To be oneself, to be something
To have a voice
It's the first being; to have a voice
It immediately assumes
A second being
A listener, it is me interpreting this voice, it is you hearing this voice
A listener is someone who gives attention to sound, make an effort to hear something, responds to advice, listening to word, to the voice.
Roxette, the Swedish rock band, in the song, *Listen to your heart*.
This other that listens is
Self, paradoxical being
Can never truly be known
The voice is this being, in this being
Is post-human?

It arises in the slow time
In concentration, thought, craft
Gathering its evidence, luminosity, limns in
Experimentation
Utility

It is the voice as notes, sketches
Broken down
By instruments of
Tensile thought, itself

We hear a voice
In the middle of intimacy, as of a boy and girl
Talking to itself
Finding its own existence
Like a paradox

It comes alive, unexplainable

This voice suffers
Like angels, the Lucifer
It wants power
Of being, wording
Talking, listening

This voice exists
As part machine
Part romantic
As any poetic adventure
It must exist

The voice doesn't exist
It dissolves, blue incense
Foam thick, it is fog, soupy fog
Driven off the mountain's slopes
By a gunning 4*4

The voice decays
Through the process
From unbodiment to embodiment, from
Embodiment to
Disembodiment, to
Unbodiment;
Is simply no body (I didn't say nobody), never like before, never
after big bang (nothingness), creation. The voice before the
before you know;
Was it silence knocking upon silence for an answering voice---
silence?
Until the first speech, the air says: spring
The air taking over spring's body
The air leaving behind winter's body

The musics of this voice is found
In standalone through lines
Through-thoughts, through-words

Allowed to intersect, to impose
Each over the other
Creating a new measure

The voice forms
Stretches of thought
Is an idea or opinion produced by thinking (I am talking of
thought), or that occurs suddenly in the mind, the process of
thinking, an intention, hope or idea of something
Language through-thoughts
To the breaking point
Of wording, listening, of being

The voice forms
Stretches of thought
Thought through-language
To the breaking point
Of non-words, non listening
Unbeing

It doesn't hear
It doesn't record
It isn't spoken
It isn't heard
It is a state of
Permanence

This voice begins to hear
Patterns of sound
It records them
In words, on sheets
Of paper, like this one
In the mind

This voice is anti-voice
Is capable, happens
Creates immense sensitivity
For the tragic irony

Of human
Miscommunication

The voice is a no-voice
It is incapable
Of sensitivity, of
Beingness
Of irony, tragically
Excommunicating (Pope's style)
Uncommunicating, is it
Miscommunicating?

It achieves radiance
It accomplishes explorations
It bounds off to the unknown
It is a known
In an unknown

The birth of human apparatus
Language, civilizations, cultures
Is an over-arching dream
Capacitating, it is observed
In leapy, bounty, large pieces
Numbers, degrees, decimals...

The decay of human apparatus
Language, civilizations, cultures
Is an interval
Its displacement, observed
In fractional, fragmentary
Pieces small, decimals small
Degrees small

This voice is grace
Grace is a half-life
The voice is a state
The grace is its stage
Decayed, incurred

Through perfection
Through imperfection
From perfection
From imperfection

The voice before pronouns
The voice after pronouns
Slippages, death
New words flutter, type, titters
Unknown words flutter, furls, flying
Words in wrong places float, fluid, water
Flowing onto each other

The voice
Creates ideas
Creates dialogues
Images into life
Images into conflict
Images into dissolution
It is resisted until it reaches a state of softened sincere insincerity
It is ironized until it doesn't hurt much
It is incepted to become words: language, civilizations, cultures...
It is killed, in a machine-death
The words break down the notion of this voice
The machine of me, like a knife cutting into the thick of things,
breaks down the notion of this voice

This voice creates the-beyond-three-persons-worlds
In half-heard words that lie like dust gathered in the shadows
It creates the fourth person
Nothing addressing itself
Xe and *Xi's*
Fourth person talking of
Third person's actions.
Beingness
As if
They were the third person
Themselves; herself, himself

It creates the fifth person

Vo, vo, vos,

By avoiding the cul-de-sacs and corners of unwanted possessions

Of complex feedback

Of complex cycles

Circles occurring

It would seem

Indefinitely

It creates the sixth person

Of impossible feedback

Of impossible cycles

Circles occurring

Indefinitely

In the seventh, eighth...

ze, fir, firs, ne, mir, mirs

epicene pronouns. Persons

In a voice not full of words,

But still saying a story more powerful than words.

The voice before first person world

The voice after the third person

It's as if, the addresser

Were one of you

One of us; *What if God was one of us*, Joan Osborne in the 90s song

Is an intimate, definite you?

Defining you.

Can you tell yourself by the trails I have left across these definitions?

Addressing yourself

As a no one

As a no person

As nothing

“Too ordinary” or acting out Jesus in the theatre of life or visceversa chapter III

By Ricardo Felix Rodriguez

“The case of W. Shakespeare must be the strangest case in the world of literature”...said Pablo, a theatre producer drinking quite a few beers.

“You say ‘case’ as if it were a matter of psychology, as if it were a clinical history from a patient”...said Jesus... “I am sorry to disappoint you Pablo; but Shakespeare is just a name”...continued Jesus, a theatre director and Pablo’s partner in the “Zoroaster Theatre Company” that was producing “king Lear” at the time.

“That’s why I am interested in this mystery”...Pablo insisted “there are no clues in Shakespeare’s biography that make us believe he was a genius”... (burps)

“What about his plays?” asked Jesus “isn’t that enough evidence for you?”

“You must agree that the life of this actor with the heart of a tiger is very common”... said Pablo flicking his cigarette ashes on the floor without taking a drag.

“Because he is a man for god’s sakes!” said Jesus

“Let me put it this way Jesus, you have read a lot of books right?”...“well, isn’t it true that in the lives of the great writers”... “there is some sort of self destructive mechanism that allows the genius to reach a determined point of enlightenment”... “Exploring the darkest corners of their imagination?”...

“I wouldn’t dare to generalize...Said Jesus.... “And I definitely wouldn’t use the word ‘self destructive.’ That goes too far my friend”...

“I think the obstacles in the way of genius are on some occasions...”

He can't find the right word and he stares into his beer, to look for it...

...” The result of a systemic conflict”... “In which a large number of diverse factors”... “Aleatory factors by the way”... “Are included”... he exhales... “Take Edgar Allan Poe for instance, you cannot say his mother died on purpose to turn him into a Genius...”

“No Jesus, but his fucking life seems to be taken out of one of his narrations”...said Pablo...

“Edgar Allan Poe, the genius, he had the whole world and god turned against him”... “And to deal with his destiny he had his art, his vice, his sex”...

Jesus spits beer out of his mouth laughing”...

“Who would have thought that tonight I would end up talking about Edgar Allan Poe's sex life”...

Jesus notices Pablo's pale face and tries to settle him down...

“OK Pablo, I am going to try to give you my real point of view about the case...” ...”In our civilization, our society and community, we are not used to individuals with extraordinary skills or qualities and I mean extraordinary including blind people, the deaf, mental retards etc”.

“The common tendency is to reject what is outside the normal bounds of society and to embrace what is familiar to us. That's why we use the term “normalize”...In the same way, a genius is rejected or threatened as a mad man...” “Intelligence and genius are very different things”

“In this case we come to another dilemma...” Pablo interrupted

“Let's say a genius has both qualities”... Said Jesus

“Not necesarally Jesus, being inteligent is different yes, but we are getting lost in words...” Said Pablo

“What’s the point?” Said Jesus... “in the end, plays by Bacon, or Johnson or Shakespeare or any other one of them, are products of the imagination of a great genius. Weather you like “his personal life” or not.

Do you want deaths shaking genius? Treasons? Curses? Prostitutes? Vices? Drugs?” “Well I am sorry to disappoint you my friend... Shakespeare is the guy who married Anne Hathaway, the actor...The Globe’s brightest’s dramaturg”...”The furtive hunter of Charlecote, I like the word furtive!...”The Man of Leicester...”

“Just remember in those times, theatre was satanized”...said Pablo...”and if I was in Bacon’s place, the bastard son of a queen...and surrounded by nobels, and kings and queens I wouldn’t dare involve my self in the theatre... I would hide my genius behind an actor, a “Shake scene” actor... I give Bacon the credit for most of the plays” (he swirls the empty glass)

“Why did he have to give it all to Shakespeare?”asked Jesus

“A thing called pride”... Said Pablo...”Bacon was big enough not to care about the final credits... “its alright you can take them” said he, while he drank a cup of wine with his friend Wiliam... after an opening show maybe in a clandestine tavern. And the actor smiled at him with unconscious anger reflected in an unworried smile... It could be Bacon talked about power through Shakespeare; laughing at royalty he knew and he couldnt reign... he was supposed to be a king..! Let them build you an altar! Let them still the deepest breath...do you think they will read between the lines?...and discover the Lion on the tiger’s lungs?”

“On the other hand, he was a man of power. As a noble..., he wanted influence. He needed it! To influence public opinion...and it’s like films today, the best way to try to spread ideas; or try to take control of people’s mind, or “hypnotize” if you want to exaggerate the truth; is theatre. It was some kind of Hamelin’s flute. Bacon

played behind the stage....and he manipulated public opinion through his art...”

“So let’s say a high spirit like Shakespeare used his skills to try to earn some power he already had...why did he publish under the name of Bacon also?”... Asked Jesus

“Because he was human, he wanted to have some credit indeed” said Pablo...”Greek, Latin, Italian, French... and I dont know how many other languages and trips and cultures... Shakespeare didn’t even go to university. He wasn’t even brilliant or talented at all...”

“...What ever you say... but the life of an artist will never be bigger than his work and legacy” said Jesus

“I am sorry but I think you are wrong, life and art are inseparable. They are complementary... Believe me Jesus, Wiliam Shakespeare is not a genius, I know that because he was too ordinary and because he didn’t expiate the sins of the others...”

“I think you are so full of bull shit!”...said Jesus

“Jesus, Jesus...believe me if there is an admirer of Shakespeare that is me”... said Pablo...”I even wrote a play inspired by his style...”

“You wrote a play?”Asked Jesus...”I didnt know you could write”...”in Shakespeare’s style?”...”I definety have to read that...”Pablo you have to show me your work man... “

“Well I have an act right here with me, the play is called “Eloise”. I would like you to read it ... and please be gentle with your criticism...” said Pablo

“Don’t worry, I will try, I promise,” said Jesus.

Jesus starts reading the play...

ACT I scene I

At the Palace, Leopoldo talks with Sebastian

Sebastian: If there is some sort of truth in these dark words you are speaking, then I shall rush this rusty sack of bones into the claws of death. For it is man's privilege to fight his last battle alone and standing on his feet than with a voracious audience mocking his destiny as he lies on the floor.

Leopoldo: Quiet! Quiet! Sebastian, my dearest son, behave! ...for it is the voice of the very same Hypocrates that howls in the deepest corner of my ear, performing an endless symphony of destiny, with no strings at all. I demand of you son, behave!

Sebastian: Dear Father have you lost your sense? Are you mad? You demand I behave? Behave sir? How should I behave? Should I dig the biggest hole on the face of the earth so I can build the greatest mausoleum for my own resting place? Should I send a thousand servants, that we don't have, to Rome in order to organize a garland of luxury and joy, that we don't have either; or better yet, send proper tiny invitations to the finest family of worms and I will turn my self into their food..., does that please you sir? Do you call this behavior?

I send a branch of black orchids every day, with a "surprise" note in each remitent to the bottom of my door, and in my improvised tomb, now I call bedroom; I will be the most faithfull friend of silence, counting every single beat of my heart, whispering life, while he sighs death..., does that please you sir?

Leopoldo: (thinks) poor man, almost son, the news has affected him. He really loves her...this revelation has caused him a brain ravage...and has wrested my daughter's enchantement from his tortured heart...

Dear son, have you forgotten in your lament, that pure angel called Eloise, now vested in a black cloud of desolation?

Sebastian: My Eloise? Forgotten? What have you said sir? I do not know what Forgotten means sir...the same mouth that had finally consented its will to a perpetual happiness has opened once more to try to bury me alive, condemn me...pity me...

Leopoldo: But Sebastian...

Sebastian: ...I die from the heart sir, you call Eloise an angel but there is no goddess such as her...I have forgotten my sweet Eloise, now I know what forgotten means, I am not like an elephant sir, is this the organ with the disease? (He touches his chest, he means the heart)

Leopoldo: no, not the heart sir not the heart... There is a little mosquito on your cheek...

Sebastian: (kills the little mosquito with his hand) I die from the heart sir, and its announced in each and every one of my departed heart beats tuc tuc, tuc, tu.. that I bump blood over your daughter's beauty

Leopoldo: Shall we continue with your marriage plans?

Sebastian: I beg you sir, let this...begger...this dying man...this elephant...enjoy his own private misfortune so he can separate and distinguish the side that laughs from the side that bleeds....for its been said that a little mosquito can turn vagrant into a king but not a king into a vagrant, can he?...

“So what do you think...do you like it?” asked Pablo...Jesus put the glass of beer to his mouth and gave a look to his friend...they stood there until the bar closed, talking about life in the theatre and visceversa...

***End of too ordinary or acting out Jesus in the theatre of life
or visceversa chapter III***

The Necessary

By Troydon Wainwright

From a Central Broadcast News television report

‘Good afternoon, this is Shelly Summers reporting live for CBN. I stand outside Huntsville State Penitentiary in Texas, where two hours from now--at exactly six thirty p.m. standard time--former president of the United States, Jeffery Tripplehorn, is scheduled to be executed by lethal injection. As you can see, the streets have been cordoned off, as tens of thousands have gathered to protest the execution and show solidarity with the former president. There are also a few hundred people on the fringes of the crowd, calling for the execution to go ahead as scheduled. Here comes one of them now. Excuse me, sir, is there anything you’d like to say to the American public?’

‘Yeah, Tripplehorn is a murderer and deserves to die for what he done. And I’ll be damned if I see him get bailed out of this by his buddy, the governor. Don’t believe for a minute that thinkin Americans don’t see through all of this. We know as sure as the sun comes up that Tripplehorn’s refusal to be pardoned so far is just a political ploy. Man, all of this is just a goddamn game to him. That bastar--’

‘Thank you, sir. As you can see, emotions are running high outside Huntsville Penitentiary. I draw your attention now to the red-haired woman, walking towards the prison’s entrance, seemingly immune to the booing crowd. For the first time since handing himself over to the authorities, President Tripplehorn has agreed to be interviewed. Oddly enough, he chose Regan Farrows, his most vocal critic in the press, to conduct the interview. As Tripplehorn insisted that she only take notes, there will be no cameras present. Will Governor Stanford pardon the former president? Or will Tripplehorn become the first US president to be executed? Stay tuned to find out. This is Shelly Summers, CBN, reporting to you live.’

From Regan Farrows’ book, Executioner-in-Chief

As I walked down the deserted, prison corridor, towards the visitor's room, I caught myself wringing my hands together. Perspiration dotted my forehead. I had never interviewed anyone this important before, nor on such an ominous day. I had already gone through the gauntlet of asking myself, why me? Why Tripplehorn had never spoken about his crimes to the public before? I still don't have any answers.

A guard opened the door and there was the former president, seated behind a plain steel desk. He wore white, prison overalls. I had read that the warden would have let him wear anything he wanted. Tripplehorn, however, insisted on wearing standard, prison issue clothing.

I entered the room and he stood to greet me. He was taller than he looked on TV and there was no mistaking his winning smile, which struck me as wholly sincere and therefore, given the circumstances, unsettling. Despite his grey hair, he looked much younger than he should have at sixty two and I could easily see how handsome he must have been as a young man.

As was standard procedure, which he insisted on, his hands were handcuffed and shackled to the table. The handcuffs jingled as I approached and he held out his hand.

'Ms Farrows,' he said, his grey eyes warm as they met mine. 'How glad I am you could come. I would step forward to greet you but...' he gave his chains a jingle. I looked at his extended hand for a moment, uncertain whether to shake with someone who had caused so many deaths. I sat down. He withdrew his hand and sat.

'I understand,' he said, 'and I don't blame you one bit. Not one bit. As a matter of fact, I wanted you to conduct this interview because I wanted someone completely unsympathetic to my cause.'

'That's me,' I replied, keeping my expression stern.

'I guess you want to get down to business,' he said. 'Believe me, I do, too. I don't have much time you know.' He smiled again and I stared back at him coldly.

'Mr Tripplehorn, I refuse to call you Mr President, I believe that-'
_,'

'I know. You believe that I should answer for my crimes, that the American people deserve an explanation. That is exactly what I intend to give them. I swear I will answer you with honesty

unbecoming of a politician.’ He almost had me there. I almost laughed. I saw then how he could sway millions; how all those people outside the prison demanding his release could still support him, even after everything he had done.

‘Okay,’ I said. ‘But don’t think for a second that I will let you bullshit me or the American people. We want answers, and I am here to get them.’

‘I expect nothing less,’ he said.

From President Tripplehorn’s inauguration speech

‘My fellow Americans, as I stand here today, I am deeply honored by the trust you have placed in me. I am also deeply humbled by the task that lies before me. Too often you have heard the promises of past presidents to create lasting change in our society, too often you have been disappointed. I too have made promises. I promised to do whatever was necessary to eradicate crime in our land and foster democracy around the world. I promised to make America great again! The only difference between me and previous presidents is that I will do whatever is necessary to keep my promises. Rest assured, my fellow Americans, there is no price I will not pay to honor my commitments to you.’

From Regan Farrows’ book, Executioner-in-chief

‘How could you do it?’ I asked Tripplehorn, as we sat in the Huntsville Penitentiary visitor’s room.

‘Well, there are two answers to that question,’ he said. ‘There’s how I could ethically do what I did and there’s how I could practically pull it off. Let’s begin with the latter. You see, the law binds me to notify Congress of any military action I have authorized within forty eight hours and to get Congress’s approval for any military action lasting longer than sixty days. Of course, a couple of presidents, like Regan, Clinton, Obama and others found ways around this. What I did was make sure all the military actions that I ordered were carried out in less than four days, nowhere near sixty. Heck, by the time Congress were informed the operation in question was usually over. What’s more my support in Congress was such that I probably could

have pushed ahead with some of my plans anyway. I also had people in the military that fully supported what I wanted to do. Not that anyone else was willing to take the risks. As you know, I used executive orders to ensure that my plans were carried out. The executive orders, of course, made it illegal for anyone to refuse my instructions. It also gave me sole responsibility for my orders. You gotta understand that I had been planning everything for years before I even got to the White House.'

'So you used the military as your own hit squad,' I said.

'Yes.' His answer caught me off guard. I had expected him to protest or find some way of saying it that made his hands seem clean. 'I figured we'd begin internationally and end locally,' he continued. 'First we bombed Kim Jong-un's palace in North Korea, killing him, his wife and eight members of his staff. Their losses are truly regrettable. After that we took out dictators in nine countries. Mostly we used airstrikes. Where airstrikes weren't possible, we sent in selected Special Forces units, as in Zimbabwe.'

'What about Saudi Arabia and Cuba?'

'Those weren't us. After awhile citizens of oppressed nations took to disposing their own dictators. The point is that within two years there were no more dictators in power anywhere on earth. In every country where we took action, democracy eventually replaced tyranny.'

'But how do you know the newly elected leaders won't become dictators themselves?'

'Given what happened to their predecessors, I doubt that any of the currently elected leaders would even try.'

I kept quiet, knowing that he had a point, although I was not about to give him the satisfaction of agreeing with him.

'You see,' he said with a smile, 'I simply did what was necessary and it worked.'

'How can you say that? We have no idea what the long term implications of your actions will be. Not to mention the diplomatic nightmare you have put the US in with the UN and the countries where you have intervened.'

'Yeah, things were heated for awhile but all that's settled down now that I am here. You are also surely aware that representatives from most of the nations where we intervened thanked us for ridding

them of tyranny. Just last month they unveiled a statue of me in Bulawayo. Besides, it's not like I haven't taken responsibility for my actions. I'm on death row, if you haven't noticed.'

'Oh, come on! What are the chances of you actually being executed?' Tripplehorn just smiled at me. I felt like slapping him but then the interview would be over and the American people, not to mention the global community, would not have their answers.

'Next question,' he said.

'What about your local...activities?' I asked. 'How do you justify them?'

Tripplehorn took a deep breath.

'For decades now the US government has known who was behind the major crime syndicates and gangs in our nation. And for decades we have been unable to bring those known criminals to justice because of lack of evidence or they had smart lawyers and so on.'

'So you ignored the law and went after them?'

'Yes,' he said. 'Again, I ordered selected Special Forces units to execute the leaders of known crime syndicates and gangs across the country.'

'Over a thousand people,' I said.

'Two thousand one hundred and eighty seven, according to my figures,' he said. We were both quiet after that and the silence lasted as I collected my thoughts.

'What about the prisons?' I asked at last. Tripplehorn took another deep breath. This was the part that I figured he would be most reluctant to answer.

'Well,' he said. 'As you probably know, back then more than fifty percent of America's crime was committed by repeat offenders. Over two thirds of all released prisoners were being arrested again within three years of being let out. That's the same people committing the same crimes, or worse, over and over again. Law enforcement reckoned six percent of our country's criminals were responsible for seventy percent of its crime.'

'I don't care about your fucking statistics!' I shouted at him and heard my voice crack, even though I wanted more than anything to keep my emotions out of it. 'What I want to know is how you did it,

you bastard? How you sleep at night?’ I cried then, just a few sobs. I couldn’t help it.

Tripplehorn’s chains rattled a little as he began to reach across to take my hand and comfort me.

‘Don’t you dare,’ I told him. He leaned back and put his hands under the table.

‘I understand you are angry,’ he said, ‘and I don’t blame you at all. Hell, I was surprised you agreed to do this interview, after what I have done to you and your kin. Nonetheless, that is exactly why I wanted you here, so that I could perhaps give you and others like you, all across America, some peace.’

From a newspaper article about Regan Farrows

Regan was born in Chicago in 1979 to a working class family. Her dad, Gasper Farrows, managed a restaurant, while her mother, Kelly, worked part time as a nurse. Regan was an only child until the birth of her brother, Aaron, in 1983. Her parents divorced when she was nine and she and her brother went to live with their mother, as her father had by then become an alcoholic. Regan earned her honors in English and journalism in 1999, from Columbia College. She went on to work as an investigative reporter for various newspapers, including *The US Report* with whom she is still employed. The newspapers started calling her The Whistleblower after she broke stories on Chicago’s Police Chief, Earl Bradley, accepting bribes from the mafia and later the Net Health Insurance scandal. In 2009 her brother, a heroin addict, was arrested and sentenced to 7 years in imprisonment for possession of heroin with the intent to sell.

From Regan Farrows’ book, Executioner-in-chief

‘You asked me how I did it,’ said Tripplehorn. ‘Well, when it came to the prisons, it was fairly simple. I had soldiers from my Special Forces units split into pairs and go to all the maximum security prisons around the country. They were disguised as health inspectors with all the proper credentials and paperwork they needed to gain full access to the prisons. They were issued with specially formulated ricin concentrates and arrived at the prisons an hour

before mealtime. They simply slipped the poison into the prison's food supply. The whole operation took less than two days. Within seven days all the maximum security inmates in the US were dead. Over a million prisoners were killed. The guards and wardens didn't even know what we were doing until it was done. When the truth came out, I resigned my office and handed myself over to the authorities.'

'I understand your brother was incarcerated in USP Marion at the time of the purge, and was due for parole within a few weeks. Nothing I say can possibly ease the pain of your loss.'

'You bastard,' I said, glaring at him.

'All I can say,' Tripplehorn continued, 'is that our country will forever be grateful for the sacrifice that he and other lesser criminals had to make for the greater good of our society.'

'Sacrifice!' I banged the table. 'What would you know about sacrifice, you worthless piece of shit?'

'I know because an uncle of mine was also killed in the purge. I know because I have spent the last four years in prison. And I know because of what is to come.'

'What uncle?' I asked. 'I've never heard anything about the President's jailbird uncle?'

'I don't suppose you would have. I went to great lengths to hide any connection between the two of us, when I decided to run for high office. His name was Walker Crawford, from my mother's side, and he helped raised me after my parents died. You can look him up: Walker Crawford of Eastville Texas. He was incarcerated for grand larceny and he died eating the same food as your brother.'

Just then the door to the visitor's room swung open and a guard stepped through.

'Mr President,' he said, 'Governor Stanford is on his way up to see you.'

'Ah,' exclaimed Tripplehorn. 'I am expecting him.'

'So here comes the cavalry, ha?' I said, with venom in my voice. 'Come to save you from the injection. Now that the whole world is watching and you've used me to clear your conscious. I suppose the interview is over?'

'No. I would like you to stay and hear what I've got to say to our beloved governor.'

Governor James Stanford strode into the room. Unlike Tripplehorn, the governor was shorter and fatter than he looked on TV. His bald head shone with perspiration and his broad smile sickened me.

‘Here I am,’ he said. ‘I’ve come to spring you--from...,’ his words and his smile trailed off, when he saw me. ‘What the hell is she still doing here?’ he asked looking at Tripplehorn before turning his eyes on me. ‘Madam, please leave.’

‘Ms Farrows stays,’ said Tripplehorn. Stanford stared at me for a moment and shook his head. He then exhaled a deep breath and shrugged.

‘Well,’ he said, turning his gaze back on Tripplehorn. ‘Are you at last ready to get out of here and pick up where you left off? I got your pardon right here.’ He lifted a piece of paper in his hand. ‘I’ll bet, with the mood in America being what it is, you could get yourself reelected without skipping a beat.’

I understood now why Stanford had waited for the last minute to pardon Tripplehorn. He wanted public sympathy for the former president to be at its peak before he intervened, so that he could say it was the will of the people that Tripplehorn be pardoned.

‘I don’t want to be pardoned,’ said Tripplehorn.

‘Oh come now, Jeffery, enough of this moral charade. You’ve won. The people love you. Hell, crime is down by over seventy percent. The murder rate has dropped from being the highest on the planet to being one of the lowest. Best of all, now that the prison population is much smaller, the remaining inmates are being given a real chance at reform. I’m sure even the world court will be willing to acquit you, given how you have changed the world for the better and all. The way you played this has been perfect. Think of it, with you as the republican candidate and someone from up North as your running mate, you would be unstoppable. And you know I will be in your corner.’

‘I will never run for office again,’ said Tripplehorn.

‘What the hell do you mean?’

‘I dreamt of breaking crime’s stranglehold on America and a world without dictators. Now we have them. But even before I stepped into the oval office, I knew the cost of my dream.’

‘That’s crazy talk,’ said Stanford, but Tripplehorn kept quiet to let what he had said sink in.

‘No man can do what I have done and go unpunished,’ he continued, after awhile. ‘If he did, he would set a standard that future leaders would follow. Besides, if I did get off scot-free then how would I be any better than those monsters that killed thousands and were never held accountable for it.’

Stanford shook his head.

‘Do you think people like Beckett, or any of those politicians who claim to be my ideological successors, will restrain themselves from using my methods to remove potential threats to their own power or interests? I must die so they know the price of following my path.’

‘Come on, Jeffery, don’t be crazy. There was nothing wrong with what you did. Hell, if past presidents had had your balls, the world would have been a better place a long time ago. You’re a great man.’ Stanford’s voice trembled as he said that last bit.

‘And I want to stay a great man,’ said Tripplehorn. ‘I want the families of all those I killed to have justice and to know that I hold myself accountable for what I did.’

‘Come on!’ said Stanford. ‘We can play on the fact that you lost your parents to crime when you were a kid. The families will understand. The majority of Americans are behind you. You’re a goddamn, international hero. You’re the bravest man I’ve ever known. You can’t die. I won’t let you die! You’re pardoned whether you want to be or not.’ Tripplehorn stood up and stepped forward until the chains restrained him. His eyes had watered up. It looked like he wanted to go over to Stanford and hug him.

‘You know I can legally refuse the pardon,’ he said. Stanford looked away from him and walked to the barred window.

‘You know this must be done,’ Tripplehorn called over to his friend. ‘It’s necessary. If I don’t pay for what I’ve done then I am no better than Hitler or Stalin or any of those bastards who never held themselves to account. Now it’s your chance, Jim, to show the world that you too can do what is necessary.’

Stanford looked at the pardon in his hand.

‘Tear it up,’ said Tripplehorn. Stanford looked away from the paper and out the window again. Tears were streaking down his

cheeks. He raised the paper and tore it up. The pieces fell onto the floor. Stanford walked over to Tripplehorn and hugged him.

'Damn you,' he said, 'damn you.' He kissed Tripplehorn on the cheek and then let him go.

'I'll never forget what you have done,' he said, as he backed up towards the door. 'The American people will never forget.'

Once Stanford was gone, Tripplehorn sat back down and the room was quiet for a long time. Tripplehorn wiped his eyes.

'I don't offer any excuses for what I done,' he said, his Texan accent becoming more pronounced. 'I was only eleven years old, when two men out on parole broke into my house and killed my ma and pa in front of me. They raped her first then my baby sister. They shot all four of us and stole what little money we had. I was the only one who survived. When I was in my early twenties, they caught the bastards. I attended their trial and recognized em right off. They never admitted to doin a goddamn thing, not one thing. All they ever spoke about was how they had been hurt as children. How society had done em wrong.' President Tripplehorn laughed briefly. 'They went to death row just like me.' He became silent again.

'I want the people to know,' said Tripplehorn, after a time, 'that I'm not hiding from anything I've done; that I'm not a victim; that I didn't do what I did solely for revenge. I simply saw a way to make things better and did what was necessary.'

The guard came in then and told me my time was up. When I got up to leave, Tripplehorn stood as well. His chains jingled again as he held out his hand. I shook it and didn't say anything as I left the room. My mind was as blank as a starless night. I walked, passed the empty cells and out of the prison in a daze that only broke when I got home.

What do I think of President Tripplehorn? Before the interview I would have written that I hated him. I would have called evil. I am no longer sure. All I know is that I will never see this fragile world the same way again.

From a Central Broadcast News television report

Good evening, this is Shelley Summers reporting to you live from outside Huntsville Penitentiary, where only minutes ago former

President Jeffery Tripplehorn was executed by lethal injection. The mood of all those gathered outside here tonight is one of deep mourning. As you can hear, many are singing a somber version of *Hail to the Chief*. Was Tripplehorn a monster, as some say? Or simply a man who did what needed to be done? The answer, as always, America, is up to you.

The Old Woman in the Threshold

By Obinna Udenwe

...it is now five years since the end of the Syrian civil war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Today, the people of Syria celebrate five years of the end of their struggle for freedom and democracy...

A high pitched female voice on BBC was saying on a transistor radio placed on a dwarfed wall, on the threshold of a two bedroom apartment. The old woman dragged her easy-chair from the sitting room to the threshold. She took her time surveying the environment – the flowers and the plants, the lizards running about and hiding under the flowerpots, the cars speeding past, and passers-by walking to their various destinations. It took some effort before she set the chair down because her hands were trembling. Her legs were swollen, her face puffy, and the sides of her eyes darkly coloured, like those of someone who wept all the time.

‘This radio... never stops talking... nonsense,’ the old woman murmured to herself. She reached for the radio. She didn’t want to hear anything about the Syrian civil war, but the dwarfed wall was out of reach. She sighed heavily and wiped her brow with her left palm.

The sky was white and sunlight threw intense rays on people, heating up everything – the asphalt roads, the zinc roofs – causing them to expand and make *kim kim* sounds. There was no breeze and people resorted to plastic handheld fans. Women returned from the markets sweating, their armpits moist. Men removed their fez-caps and dabbed their faces with the same scarves they wiped their nostrils and shoes with. The old woman watched in silence, shutting her ears to the words from the radio and occasionally tucking her black singlet into the wrapper around her waist.

...today, there are celebrations in every part of Syria. I am reporting from Damascus where young men and women, children and their parents are gathered in the square, singing freedom songs and shouting ‘Alhamdulillah’

Whenever it was this hot, the old woman would drag out her easy-chair and sit in front of her house. This time, the sky was white,

with traces of gray. The trees were not swirled by the breeze because the breeze was nowhere to be found. The road was deserted – only few were ready to thread the road under the intense heat. Few cars passed, in some, their drivers did not wind down their windows because they had air-conditioners – the old woman was sure. She watched, sitting on her cane easy-chair. She rested her head against the back of the chair. Her headscarf nearly fell off. Lizards came close to her feet, eating crumbs from the bread she had snacked on earlier in the morning.

As the BBC reporter began to interview a Syrian activist, gray clouds began to cover the whiteness. The breeze came lazily, drifting the old woman in and out of sleep interrupted by thoughts of regrets and despair. Despondency.

‘Radios don’t play music anymore. Now it is talk, talk... talk. Always. Always.’ She sighed and closed her eyes.

Soon it would be six years since she lost her only daughter, Emilia, in Syria. She loved her and sat on her chair every evening, thinking of her, wondering what her spirit was doing – if it had rested in peace or if it roamed the streets looking for news stories. The streets always had stories for Emilia. First it had started in the streets of Lagos, where she’d found stories in the strangest of places – in people’s rooms where families died of fumes from small power generating sets, in kitchens where women were stabbed by their husbands, in dark alleys where girls were raped, in clubs where young girls danced nude, with their breasts warming the eyes of men. Emilia’s face was on television, reporting these stories and the old woman never missed them.

The old woman imagined her daughter’s spirit would go back to those places her body travelled to when she was alive, microphone in hand, reporting news – to Darfur, Mali, Iraq and Somalia, so many places and finally to Syria, where she’d died. She missed the phone calls from those strange places.

The old woman opened her eyes. The two bedroom apartment was on a small piece of land. There was a small garden at the back where the old woman cultivated spinach. There were plants scattered around the apartment – a guava plant, some shaddock plants, and an orange tree. There were large clay pots and plastic vases hosting flowers. Since she lost Emilia and her business died along with her,

since her only son took an Ijebu woman whom she was sure, enchanted and seized him at Ibadan, and made him forget his mother, the old woman resorted to catering for her *Cycas* and Queen of Philippine. Her Yellow Bush and *Phucus* lined the front rows of her building. The plants were her companion – she talked to them and they responded with the swaying of their leaves, growing and flowering to her delight. The old woman was saddened by little things — her Bougainvillea was growing too wild and she wondered why. But her Queen Palm and *Phucus* gave her joy. They kept her busy as she watered and pruned them very often. They made her strong, in mind and in body. Sometimes they filled the void in her spirit and the emptiness in her heart.

...in the town of Aleppo, we report that young people will gather at the square to keep vigil, playing bands and music till the next morning....

The old woman sighed. She reached for the radio reluctantly but withdrew her hand as a car honked. She sat back and closed her eyes. Six years had gone by. Six years before, in 2012, she had returned from the marketplace, tired and weary —she had removed her headscarf and sat on the cushion, watching a special report on the Syrian crisis on NTV news. She had closed the shop early to return home because for the past two days, NTV had been reporting the war in Syria where a man had clung to power, though the people he ruled wanted him no more, his obsession for power causing their deaths, in hundreds of thousands, including that of Emilia. The old woman recalled that Emilia had called to tell her she was leaving for Turkey, from where she would enter Syria to cover the news. NTV had been missing out on the happenings on the ground, leaving the cake for CNN and Aljazeera, Emilia had said, and they were sending her.

The old woman sat up, tears ran down her cheeks. She reached the transistor radio and turned it off.

‘Stupid... radio,’ she said in a crackly voice. She placed the radio beside her. ‘If you talk again, I... I will throw you to the wall. Do you think my hands are... too old to hit you hard on the wall? Nonsense.’ She shut her eyes and murmured to herself, ‘Why did I put this stupid radio on in the first place....’ She sighed. ‘The world was better off

when there were no televisions and radios. Now you can't even sleep. They talk endlessly. What do they show on TV now? Death. Death. Dead people. Everywhere.'

'The white man brought all these problems. They make radios, televisions, cars... everything. I can't even sit in front of my own house in peace... cars are zooming past, playing loud music. *Mtchew.*' The old woman's lips contorted in anguish. She talked to herself some more about all her misfortune – her dead husband, her son who had forgotten her, her maid that ran away, her business that died with Emilia.

Emilia. Her mind went to Syria again.

When Emilia was in Syria, the old woman would return early, tune the television to NTV and watch as Emilia reported the crisis. But that evening, what she saw was awful. As soon as she'd settled on the sofa, the air-conditioner turned on by her shopkeeper who doubled as maid, Emilia's face appeared and she began to comment on the crisis.

...the war in Syria between the opposition group and the Assad regime has reached its highest level, as the opposition seem to be gaining more grounds...

A smile had escaped the old woman's lips. She drank from the tall glass of water the maid had offered her. She removed her shoes and her blouse, exposing a large brassiere, cupping sagging large breasts. She lay down on the sofa and watched.

...few days back the opposition forces authoritatively announced that they now hold the town of Aleppo, which was before now occupied by the Syrian army. Today, reporting from the town of Raqqa, I can tell you that the rebels have claimed this town...

The old woman watched as a picture of the war torn town flashed on the screen. She saw rebels in long gowns, carrying Kalashnikovs as they ran around, buildings were engulfed in smoke, vehicles were burning, and some youths in a square in the centre of Raqqa were pulling down the statue of Bashir Al-Assad's father.

...as you can see, the rebels have totally taken over this city. The statue of President Assad's father that used to stand at the city centre has been pulled down by angry mobs and they are hitting at the statue with their shoes, hammers and whatever they can lay their hands on. We can report now that...

Just then, spurts of gunfire from nowhere swept the place where Emilia was standing and hit her. In a split second, Emilia was on the ground. Her head and body were covered with her own blood. The camera caught the incident before it fell and crashed. The screen was covered with blue lines. The old woman heard some bizarre sound and her brain processed the incident in seconds. She jumped from the sofa and stood, she screamed loudly. In her eyes, the white ceiling shook. The thick curtains swirled and folded in ripples. Then she fell. The television changed to live streaming, with a broadcaster as confused as the viewers, trying to reassure the viewers that everything was alright.

As the old woman sat on the threshold, hot tears dropped on her hairy arm. She was startled. She sat up. Women returning from markets and workplaces were chatting loudly, they greeted her but she ignored them.

'They are looking for... for gossips,' she soliloquized. An agama lizard climbed out from one of the flower pots and ran into her wild Bougainvillea. The old woman stretched wearily and her leg hit the transistor. It fell. She picked it up and turned it on. She began to twist the knob, searching for other radio frequencies, but could only hear static sounds. Finally, she gave up and tuned the radio back to BBC. An activist was talking;

...the Syrian revolution affected not just the Syrian people but the entire world in a lot of ways....

This attracted the attention of the old woman. She blinked several times and listened.

...over a hundred thousand people died in the bloody civil war. This includes foreigners who are not Syrians. I think about these people – men and women who laid down their lives for Syria. For freedom. Some of them were journalists and medical personnel from other countries. The war was fought in Syria but its

impact, its effect, reached almost all the corners of the world. We weep for those families who lost their sons and daughters in Syria. The Syrian people regret that you feel enormous pain. We grieve with you...

Tears dropped from the old woman's eyes. She held the transistor to her breasts, allowing the voice from the radio to soothe her pain and caress her feelings. All these years, she had been waiting for those words, an explanation from Syria on why Emilia had died. Finally it came, she hadn't expected it but it made her new, light, empty even.

...everywhere in the world, people have suffered pain, pain caused by others – there have been pogroms, genocides, killings – all these are man's inhuman activities to fellow man. But some brave souls sometimes rise to challenge these. These souls face a lot of troubles, pains, and tribulations. In our case, people stood up for Syria and lost their lives helping our people to be free. For this we are indeed deeply saddened and we owe their souls and their families our condolences, our prayers, our support....

The old woman opened her eyes. She was happy. Emilia was dead, but she died so that millions of children and women could have a better life.

...It is because of the souls of all these martyrs that we hold these vigils. Not just because we commemorate our freedom. No. It is because we remember and honour the souls of those men and women, who laid their lives for the Syrian cause....

Emilia's face came to the old woman's mind as she imagined Syrians celebrating freedom. She smiled; for Emilia died doing the job that gave her joy. She died fighting for the freedom of millions of vulnerable women and children. She thought about some women who had lost their daughters to ritual killings, armed robbery attacks, and gang rapes. She recalled her neighbour's daughter, who was in the Law College, but had died in an auto crash the day she was returning home for vacation. She knew then, that if Syrians were free it was because of all the tiny indecipherable roles played by people from other countries. People like Emilia. For once the old woman

acknowledged that she had lost Emilia, nothing would bring her back, but her death had brought freedom and love to other people.

Then the radio began playing Yanni's symphony, *Deliverance*. The old woman, still clutching the transistor, closed her eyes in fulfilment and happiness. She threw back her head against the chair and darkness began to chase the gray cloud towards the far horizon as people returning from the markets and workplaces were chatting noisily. The *Cycas* swirled side by side from gentle wind. Some passers-by greeted the old woman whose eyes were closed in sleep.

After a while, two women returning from church approached the old woman for their usual chats. They greeted her severally. Then they tapped her gently on the shoulder, but her head hung by the side and her mouth was open, showing empty eyes, and a benign face.

Quest for my dignity

By Connie Fick

I've been on a lifelong search for my dignity, but it eludes me. Every time we are in the same place, I reach out, but it jumps up like some small startled animal and runs away.

The first time it happened I was on a train with my father. We had just disembarked and were waiting for another train. Where we lived, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, we had to get two trains to reach town; one to Langlaagte and then a different one to town.

While waiting at the Langlaagte station, a white policeman came up and talked to my father in an aggressive manner. In my thirteen-year-old mind, I couldn't see what our transgression had been. The policeman was young, in blue uniform with a club on his belt.

My first response was surprise. What did we do to warrant such a thing? I was quizzically looking at him, trying to guess at what was happening when my father started apologising. "Asseblief my baas. Please, boss. We're just waiting for the train."

Instead of placating the policeman, this spurred him on and he unleashed a new torrent of abuse. He was speaking to my father. The man I looked up to and adored. Although only thirteen, I knew that he was humiliating my father and rejoicing in it.

A searing anger filled my heart. Hitherto, an avid reader with no access to stories about my own people, I had been reading books for white people and cultivated an outlook with an awareness of my rights.

Surely this was wrong. How dare a young man speak to an older man like that? My indignance rose. Didn't he have any manners? I shook with fury. "That is enough," I said to the young man. He stopped and looked at me in disbelief. Before he could respond, my father started grovelling: "Asseblief my baas. Groot baas," and dragged me away.

I was ashamed of my father. I looked at him and suddenly he had grown smaller. I didn't know that his first instinct was to protect me. And that he would do whatever was required, even humiliate himself. I had never met that side of his love before. Hitherto, I had only seen the smiling, nurturing side.

On the way home we didn't speak much. I could see that he was embarrassed. In witnessing my father losing his dignity, my own was diminished.

We never spoke about it afterwards. He didn't reprimand me or explain. It just slipped into the trough of things not talked about.

In my innocence, I was proud of myself. Someone had insulted my father and I had stood up for him. Mixed in with my displaced pride was the first crinkle of my existence as a black person in South Africa. The values I had imbibed from books didn't apply to me. *The Famous Five, Trompie and Saartjie* were from another planet. There were different laws that governed my existence. And in them was no thought about my dignity.

*

Rape

He took my pride
abused me
pushed protests aside
misused me
extinguished the light
inside me
tainted my own sight
of what's me.

He took my life
before me
no longer a wife
(he's ashamed of me)
an anchorite
he made me
in just one night
destroyed me.

*

It was my first child. A needle set in the crook of my arm, plaster, fluid running cold into my vein; my resolve not to scream forgotten.

Okay, I won't scream but I will moan. It sounded like somebody else. In a line-up of shrieks I wouldn't recognise mine. A stranger had

taken over my body; a stranger who wasn't shy to groan. Shut up, I said.

Answered questions, when it started, how long it lasts. I put on a short white gown, open at the back, not bothering to close the blue-green curtain. Pain, a dull ache, started in the small of my back. It moved down, burning, gathering strength, in my sacrum. It radiated to my stomach. I pressed my fingers deep into my groin to massage the pain. First, a gentle squeeze at my womb's lower end, and then an iron grip reached up to my sternum.

A man at the next bed; he didn't belong there. He was drunk, snoring upright on a bench.

I noticed a cockroach as I shoved my bag – packed according to the hospital pamphlet – into the locker. Kneeling on the floor until the pain abated, I didn't care who saw me. In my world of pain there was no space for shame. Vast, it stretched from ceiling to floor, from wall to wall.

Another cycle: back, sacrum, lower abdomen, sternum. Like music, a regular rhythm. No rest in-between.

My arm tingled, the oxytocin drip too fast. What are you trying to do, kill me? Where's the doctor? What did you say? Not here, still coming. Moaning doesn't help. Three minutes feel like seconds, not enough time to stitch my fortitude. The light's too bright. Okay, breathe.

A gloved hand swivelled inside me, fingers clawing a long time. An examination; a stretch and sweep.

Breathing wasn't helping. Whose idea was it to breathe at a time like this anyway? The desire to push so strong, stronger than the brain saying breathe. What? Breathe? I am breathing! And I'm going to die if I don't obey my body. Back, sacrum, lower abdomen, sternum; the pain stretched my pelvic floor, my stomach harder than a cricket ball.

Why are you shouting? And why are you swearing? I'd changed from a gentle person into a harridan, just like the pain. It had started gently and now it was breaking my body apart. He was still there, the stranger; why didn't he go home? Or was it a mirage? My moans built to a crescendo; the womb a muscle that would grow thin and tear rather than stop. Primitive nature took over, heeding no one.

Swollen, like a wheel. The swelling would go down in two to three days. In the meantime it was difficult to walk. I had to hang onto the walls for support.

*

“You have an opportunistic infection,” the doctor said. “Your CD4 count is low.”

It was like a blow to my chest.

“There’s fluid in your lungs. We’ll have to drain it. Tell me, why did you stop coming for your treatment?”

I had no answer, recalling my healing by the great Benny Hinn. He had come to South Africa on a cold, rainy day. I had queued for hours under an umbrella which kept off the rain but not the faint mist that sifted down around it, leaving me cold and wet.

Eventually we were seated. I sat in the section of the ill, close to the stage where we could go up for an anointing. Around me desperate people, some in wheelchairs, others carried in by friends and relatives.

When the service started I was giddy with relief. I prepared myself. I sang. I prayed, swaying with intensity and weakness. I sat down. I stood up. Still we prayed. I listened to five sermons – wedged in-between the band playing and the singing – about giving. God gave to those who gave to His church.

Someone passed cards around for our bank details and an amount to pledge each month. I filled it in. I cried. I waited.

At last it was time to go onto the stage. We filed in queues, helped by ushers. I was so far from the stage I was worried that I would not get there with so many people around.

We crowded forward, our eyes wet with tears of expectation. Just when I reached the steps that led to the stage, someone stepped in front of me, his arms outstretched. I looked up. Benny Hinn had disappeared.

An announcement was made. He had healed enough for one day. The rest of us would have to come back another time. A man on a stretcher started sobbing. I tried to reason with the huge man blocking my way. I have to see him, I said. I’ve come from far. I will not be able to come again.

Again I was thirteen years old, pleading to be seen, to be recognised as a person with dignity. Again my dignity and I were not

in the same place. It'd deserted me when I needed it most. My pleas fell on indifferent ears. I followed the throng of the returning ill, exhausted.

Benny Hinn never laid hands on me but still I believed that I had been healed. I didn't need medication as long as I believed, if my faith was strong enough. I thanked the Lord every day for my healing. I went to church. I donated my tenth to the Lord's church, but the coughing and diarrhoea did not stop.

Soon I became short of breath.

Glossary

Asseblief my baas = *Please my boss*

Groot baas = *Big boss*

Revolutionary diaries

by Anton Krueger

november, 2015

the problem with protest is this: we want to change society, yes, to create something better...we like to think that our protests, our fights, our rage will change things, right? ...and yet we are also generating the new society by our actions... ..

so we hope that the ideal society will come into being in the future as a result of our revolution and yet the revolution is also society...what we are doing is creating that kind of world – a world of spray paint, marches, denigration, insult – that is the society being created...what we're doing...

if we wanted a peaceful, respectful, tolerant society then that is what we would need to bring into being...it makes no sense to think that destructive, demeaning actions could lead to a world that's equitable and fair and harmonious...that would be illogical, surely...

coz we are never outside society...this is it...we are the traffic...we are simultaneously bringing a new society into being, while being society itself... one cannot step outside of the world to try to change the world...the way in which we act in trying to change the world is already the world itself...

december, 2015

the new star wars film – mishmash of new politics (gender, race), old politics (anti-fascist w/ the nazi rally imagery & references to an evil “supreme leader” –i.e. north korea and mao), and the usual cambellian links to mythology, religion, etc...and yet, ultimately, missing the point altogether coz it's still about glorifying war and promoting the allegedly “good fight”, the justified vengeance...the side of right is honoured and rewarded for its bombs, its sabotage, its killing...it's all ok this time, coz now we got a black guy and a woman doing the killing, now everything is fine...we're free...but it's the same old quagmire, man, dragging us down...same old attachments

to sex beauty & aversion to the monsters we fear whom we don't understand ...

january, 2016

the heroism of resilience, vs the heroism of productivity: on our continent, the heroes are the ones who have resisted the colonials, yea?...so the heroics are defensive – resisting assimilation, refusing to be dominated...our heroes died in detention, on hunger strikes, at the noose...they are great because they were killed by the villainous...

and yet, the heroism of productivity – your Dalai Lama is someone able to bring peace, healing, education, medicine, satisfaction to the mind's restlessness....and so on – this is different...his resistance to his country's colonisation was well thought through, calm, sensible, aware of consequences...or take someone who made good with what they were given (privileged, sure), who extended the fields of learning, knowledge, skill, expertise, human value, human goodness...these are positive values...they add onto...

these values are not only the negation of loss, the resistance of evil which hopes to restore a neutral point from which to operate...but the long term problem, if you've invested in these values, is what do you do once you've reached the neutral point? and can it even ever be attained? where would you locate it?

coz even if you got there, the impetus is pushing, pushing...it's got momentum, needs to keep going...so you gotta keep getting more and more “anti-racist” ...if that was your negation....it's gotta then unearth more racism, relocate the enemy, or find new ones...

february, 2016

we are mostly still colonised by america...these slogans at the south african revolutions: “black lives matter” (invented in chicago?), the talk of privilege (from american universities?)...black power (new york?)...these are selected revolutionary ideals fomented against the imperial power, but when it comes to standing strong on our own

wisdom, on our own real experienced past history and attempts at reconciling terrible truths and inequalities, what happens then? are all mass movements the same?...all the same abstractions? the difficulty is to really think for yourself...maybe nobody can...maybe thought is maybe always communal, no way out...maybe...

march, 2016

something fragile about this country, south africa...i want to speak out, but i'm afraid...i'm not scared of the bad people, the obvious "criminals" or those who are racist or liars or mean or bullies or whatnot...i'm more afraid of the good people...the well-meaning...the ones willing to march and to demonstrate and to fight and shout...all for a good cause...those are the one's i'm scared of...coz their well-meaning ire is going to land us in the fire...

PLAYS/ OBRAS DE TEATRO

Los Viajeros

By Martin Sosa Cameron

PIEZA EN UN ACTO

PERSONAJES

PRIMER HOMBRE

PRIMERA MUJER

SEGUNDO HOMBRE

SEGUNDA MUJER

EMPLEADO DEL FERROCARRIL

En una estación de ferrocarril, al mediodía, sentados o parados, los VIAJEROS —dos HOMBRES y dos MUJERES— aguardan el tren alrededor de un largo banco.

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A la PRIMERA MUJER.*) ¿Demorará mucho en llegar el tren?

PRIMERA MUJER.— (*Al PRIMER HOMBRE.*) Creo que no: siempre es puntual.

PRIMER HOMBRE.— ¡Es que estoy tan apurado!

SEGUNDO HOMBRE Y SEGUNDA MUJER.— ¡Todos estamos apurados! ¡Llegará, llegará!

(*Aparece el EMPLEADO DEL FERROCARRIL.*)

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*Al EMPLEADO.*) ¿Cuánto falta para que llegue el tren, señor?

EMPLEADO.— Muy poco: jamás demora, ni viene antes: es exacto.

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¡Estamos tan apurados!

EMPLEADO.— Por favor, tengan paciencia, no tardará (*Se retira*).

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A/ SEGUNDO HOMBRE.*) Yo voy hacia el norte, ¿y usted?

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— (*A/ PRIMER HOMBRE.*) Yo hacia el este, (*A la PRIMERA MUJER.*) ¿y usted, señora?

PRIMERA MUJER.— (*A/ SEGUNDO HOMBRE.*) Yo voy hacia el oeste, (*A la SEGUNDA MUJER.*) ¿y usted?

SEGUNDA MUJER.— (*A la PRIMERA MUJER.*) ¿Yo? Pues, yo voy al sur...

PRIMER HOMBRE.— Menos mal que todos vamos hacia distintos lugares, si no no podríamos tomar el mismo tren.

PRIMERA MUJER.— ¡Distintos y distantes!

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— Ya no soporto esta espera, ¿estará retrasado?

PRIMERA MUJER.— Pareciera que sí; yo también comienzo a inquietarme.

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¡Se hace esperar muchísimo!
(*Vuelve el EMPLEADO.*)

EMPLEADO.— ¡Cómo! ¿Todavía están aquí?

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¡Claro! ¿Cómo habríamos de irnos si el tren no llegó?

EMPLEADO.— ¿Cómo que no llegó, si ya pasó? ¿No lo vieron?

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¿Cómo vamos a verlo? No ha pasado...

EMPLEADO.— Entonces lo han perdido: ya pasó, ¿cómo no se dieron cuenta?

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¿Cuándo, en qué momento? No vimos nada...

EMPLEADO.— ¿Cómo pueden ser tan distraídos? Es evidente que están aquí porque no lo vieron, por eso no lo tomaron: lo han perdido... Ya pasó y hasta mañana no hay otro.

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¡Pero si no lo vimos! ¡Ni lo oímos!

EMPLEADO.— ¡Es increíble! Pasó y ustedes no subieron.

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¡Caramba, usted! ¿Es que no entiende? ¡No pasó, no, no pasó, no pasó!

EMPLEADO.— Les digo que sí, hace sólo unos momentos, exactamente a la hora que debía, yo lo ví, controlen sus relojes si dudan. (*Cada uno de los otros mira su reloj.*)

LOS VIAJEROS.— Es cierto, a esta hora... ¡Se atrasó!

EMPLEADO.— ¡Eso es imposible! ¡Yo lo ví: ya pasó, no insistan!

LOS VIAJEROS.— (*Entre sí y al EMPLEADO.*) Y ahora, ¿qué haremos? ¡Hemos perdido el día! ¡Con el apuro y la urgencia que tenemos!

EMPLEADO.— El tiempo es un capricho..., ¡todo es relativo! Tendrán que volver mañana... ¡Y bien temprano! No sea que lo pierdan de nuevo...

PRIMERA MUJER.— Ahora cada uno deberá volver a la ciudad con las manos vacías, ¡otro día perdido! El tren es lo único que tenemos para llegar a nuestra ciudad y para salir de ella...

PRIMER HOMBRE.— ¡La ciudad es feísima! Ni caminos ni calles tiene, todas las casas están unas arriba de otras, ha ido creciendo por yuxtaposición, todo está pegado; la puerta de salida de una casa sólo sirve para entrar en la de al lado...

SEGUNDA MUJER.— ... O a la de arriba o a la de abajo... En la de atrás o en la de un costado...

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— Vista de lejos, parece un montón de peñascos apilados, de infinitos escombros...

PRIMERA MUJER.— Todo es un inconveniente: mi pobre madre, con sus noventa años, vive sola a más de veinte metros de altura, y cada día, cada hora, debe subir y bajar como puede, sin ayuda, para conseguir sus alimentos, y le es imposible, por su edad, hacer muchos esfuerzos, de manera que no puede comprar varias cosas al mismo tiempo y luego acarrearlas: ¿cómo haría para subir, para trepar, con tanto peso colgando de sus gastados brazos? Entonces, sube y baja una y otra vez, una y otra vez para llevar a su cocina, una por una, las cosas que necesita...

PRIMER HOMBRE.— Todos los viejos tienen esos problemas... Tampoco tenemos intimidad: yo vivo con mi mujer a treinta metros de alto, nuestra cocina no abre a la calle sino al baño del vecino..., cada vez que salimos y entramos es un problema: y no tenemos otra puerta para salir de casa... Y de la del vecino hay que pasar a la de otro, y de la de éste a la de abajo, y a la de más abajo, y así...

SEGUNDA MUJER.— Y andamos todos chocándonos y cruzándonos adentro y afuera, a toda hora; pasear es imposible, distraerse también, sólo sabemos quejarnos.

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— ¡Y ni qué decir cada vez que se demuele o se construye una casa! ¡Todos son trastornos!

PRIMERA MUJER.— Hasta que venimos acá, a la estación, nuestro único respiro... ¡y vean lo que nos pasa!

SEGUNDA MUJER.— ¡Lo que nos pesa!

PRIMER HOMBRE.— ¡Lo que nos pisa!

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— Nuestra ciudad es el urbanismo llevado al máximo: es un bochorno, la capital de la promiscuidad; a veces no sé con quién estoy en mi cama...

PRIMERA MUJER.— ...Ni en el baño...

SEGUNDA MUJER.— ...Ni en el comedor...

PRIMER HOMBRE.— ¡Y todos somos tan indiferentes, tan apáticos!

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— Los únicos que están cómodos son los que viven abajo: esos casi nunca tienen que subir.

PRIMERA MUJER.— Pero muchas veces necesitan algo, y entonces deben trepar.

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— Y ya nada se puede modificar ni mejorar: abajo, a lo ancho, ya no hay lugar para construir: sólo nos queda crecer para arriba, como las ramas de un árbol.

PRIMERA MUJER.— Sí, pero de un árbol enloquecido, que pareciera tener el tronco más ancho que la copa... ¡Y eso que no tenemos árboles!

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— Y tampoco podemos irnos, pues, ¿quién, sabiendo de dónde somos, va a querer comprar una casa en nuestra ciudad? Lo único que nos queda es irnos con las manos vacías, pero, por nuestros hábitos, ya no podemos vivir en otra parte.

PRIMER HOMBRE.— Ni los que curan enfermedades mentales se atreven con nosotros.

SEGUNDA MUJER.— Antes no sé cómo hacían con las urgencias; menos mal que luego apareció el dirigible...

PRIMER HOMBRE.— ...Luego el globo...

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— ...Y ahora el helicóptero...

PRIMERA MUJER.— Necesitaríamos cohetes para que suban los de abajo y paracaídas para que descendan suavemente los de arriba...

EMPLEADO.— ¿Y el tren? ¿No es lo más útil?

PRIMERA MUJER.— El tren, claro, pero lo perdemos...: ¡no podemos ser puntuales!

PRIMER HOMBRE.— Los del tren nos desprecian, no tienen contemplación, ni caridad, ni calidad...

EMPLEADO.— Nosotros somos muy respetuosos con todos nuestros clientes.

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— (*A la PRIMERA MUJER.*) Estos empleados del ferrocarril son todos unos farsantes, hipócritas y desconsiderados.

EMPLEADO.— (*Al SEGUNDO HOMBRE.*) ¿Qué dice usted? ¿No está conforme con el tren?

LOS VIAJEROS.— (*Al EMPLEADO.*) ¡Oh, sí: sí, señor, estamos muy conformes, contentos y felices!

EMPLEADO.— ¡Eso quería oír! ¡Somos infalibles!

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) Si no les doramos la píldora, el tren pasará de largo por aquí, y ya no tendremos qué usar; estamos a merced de sus antojos, sus horarios y su beneficio: nadie nos toma en cuenta.

SEGUNDO HOMBRE, PRIMERA MUJER Y SEGUNDA MUJER.— (*Al PRIMER HOMBRE.*)

Tiene usted toda la razón, ¿quién puede tenernos en cuenta? Somos de la peor ciudad del mundo.

PRIMER HOMBRE.— No tenemos pasado ni porvenir, nos han olvidado, carecemos de perspectivas, y eso es culpa de los intelectuales como éste (*Señala al EMPLEADO*).

SEGUNDO HOMBRE, PRIMERA MUJER Y SEGUNDA MUJER.— ¡Los intelectuales son los causantes de todos nuestros problemas!

EMPLEADO.— Si no fuera por nosotros, ¿qué sería de ustedes?

LOS VIAJEROS.— (*Al EMPLEADO.*) ¡Intelectuales! Para lo único que sirven es para escribir.

PRIMER HOMBRE.— ¿Qué es uno que escribe? ¿Un escritor? ¿Qué es un escritor?

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— Es lo que hacen los genios cuando no sirven para otra cosa... Este (*Señala al EMPLEADO.*) al menos pierde algo de tiempo en esta estación, ¡tampoco ellos obtienen mejores empleos!

PRIMERA MUJER.— ¡Pero están más cómodos que nosotros!

SEGUNDA MUJER.— Cualquier trabajo en nuestra ciudad es insoportable.

PRIMERA MUJER.— El peor de todos es dar clases en una escuela.

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— ¡No: lo más inaguantable es el de los que se dedican a la limpieza! ¿Cómo hacer para que una ciudad como la nuestra esté limpia, higiénica?

PRIMERA MUJER.— Para ninguno es fácil, por eso nadie quiere a nuestra ciudad ni a los que vivimos en ella.

EMPLEADO.— ¿Pueden dejar de quejarse?

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A/ EMPLEADO.*) ¿Qué sabe usted, que sólo conoce de poesía?

PRIMERA MUJER.— La poesía es un arte para niños: más compleja es la natación.

SEGUNDA MUJER.— Pero en nuestra ciudad nadie puede practicarla.

EMPLEADO.— ¿A qué? ¿A la poesía? ¿Nadie sabe leer de ustedes? ¿Lo han olvidado?

PRIMER HOMBRE.— El arte, las ciencias y todas esas tonterías, como la teología, no sirven para nada: lo único que importa es la comida ¡eso vale la pena!

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— ¡Y los medicamentos!

PRIMER HOMBRE.— Que son otra comida.

LOS VIAJEROS.— (*A/ EMPLEADO.*) ¡Viva la comida! ¡La comida es el principio y el fin de la vida! ¡Comer es vivir!

EMPLEADO.— ¿No piensan, no rezan, no sienten otras cosas? ¡Carecen de alimentos mentales!

LOS VIAJEROS.— (*A/ EMPLEADO.*) ¡Es que vivimos cansados, hartos, sólo sabemos comer! ¿Para qué queremos lo demás?

EMPLEADO.— Si no fuera por los imaginativos, los creadores, los que piensan, los más dotados, no tendrían ni el dirigible, ni el globo ni el tren y ni siquiera sus casas.

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¡Todo para nosotros es incómodo, insalubre, molesto! ¡Sólo nos movemos para alimentarnos!

PRIMER HOMBRE.— Sembramos frutas en macetas, criamos animales en nuestras salas de estar, no nos faltan ni el alimento ni el agua: por la conformación de nuestra ciudad, cada vez que llueve tenemos agua sin cesar.

EMPLEADO.— ¡Qué poco ambiciosos que son, como todos los quejosos! Están insatisfechos con ustedes mismos, por eso están llenos de odio hacia los demás y hacia ustedes, ¡resentidos! ¡No tienen espíritu! ¡Sólo les funciona el estómago!

PRIMER HOMBRE.— ¡Eso, eso, tiene razón! Yo tengo ganas de comer a esta hora, (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) ¿y ustedes?

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— ¡Yo también!

PRIMERA MUJER.— ¡Yo también!

SEGUNDA MUJER.— ¡Yo también!

SEGUNDO HOMBRE, PRIMERA MUJER Y SEGUNDA MUJER.— (*Al unísono.*) ¡Queremos comer!

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) ¿Volvemos a la ciudad?

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— (*Al EMPLEADO.*) ¿No hay nada aquí, en la estación, para comer?

EMPLEADO.— Aquí sólo hay libros, y yo.

PRIMERA MUJER.— (*Al EMPLEADO.*) No insista, que si nos impacienta lo devoramos a usted.

SEGUNDA MUJER.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) ¡Está apetitoso! Y además es joven, su carne debe ser tierna.

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) Cuando llegue la locomotora lo cocinamos en ella.

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) Pero deberemos esperar hasta mañana.

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) No podemos ser tan pacientes. Volver a la ciudad nos llevará tiempo, ¡y cuánto deberemos trepar! Mejor lo comemos ahora.

SEGUNDO HOMBRE.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) ¡Atrapémoslo ya! (*Se abalanzan sobre el EMPLEADO.*)

EMPLEADO.— ¿Están locos? Si me comen, ¿quién parará el tren? ¿Quién los atenderá?

LOS VIAJEROS.— Es un reflexivo, no podemos vencerle: tiene razón, ¿qué haremos sin él?

PRIMER HOMBRE.— (*A los otros VIAJEROS.*) Lo comemos sin ropa, la usa uno de nosotros para disfrazarse y así detener el tren.

EMPLEADO.— ¡No saben cómo hacerlo! ¡No tienen capacidad ni preparación! ¡Son unos ignorantes!

LOS VIAJEROS.— ¡Cállese, engreído! Lo disculpamos gracias al tren, ¡ya verá cuando volvamos! (*Se retiran.*)

EMPLEADO.— (*Al público.*) Desde hace años es así, todos los días... El tren, ¿cuándo pasará? ¿Cuándo parará?

NON FICTION/NO FICCION

A short personal essay on writing

By Oroni Tendera

My Own Writing

It's three am. The silence in my traditionally noisy neighborhood is unusually deafening. Harsh fluorescent light overhead glare at my paper, pen and I. A bone freezing breeze is blowing furiously into my crib, thanks to the lone open window. For that reason, my thin hairy legs are partially parted-back arched forward-face elongated.

"I have been waiting for inspiration to strike for the past thirty minutes. What am I supposed to write?" I wonder.

"Write anything literary, you will literally start from there," I muse.

My cold fingers clasp around my pen. I hold the pen tightly upon the paper, trembling. "I shall write an absurd drama. Like the theatre of the absurd, life is a repetition of empty clichés and mysteries. No, life is no mystery. I shall write a tragedy. Like a tragedy, life is a journey whose final destiny is darkness. No, writing a tragedy is a heroic but horrific experience. I have to write a high comedy. No, our society is too lazy to unearth humour in a high comedy. What of penning a poem? A sonnet that blends Shakespearean and Italian structures? No, that sounds too scholarly.

I tilt my pen. My head snaps with a click. I feel a sharp pain crawl down my spine. My pen jumps out of my hand. I slump deeper into my seat. "I want to write right now," I cry.

The whole of my body is immobile. My neck is stiff. My eyes are pulsating with pain. My lower and upper teeth have become inseparable. My hanging lips have grabbed each other like copulating couples. I cannot stick out my long tongue. I can't think. I can't see. I can't feel. I can't smell. Am I slipping into a comma?

VROOM! Traffic is rekindling outside. "I must write before it is too late," I mutter. I struggle to lift my head. It falls back to the headrest. I manage to lift my right hand, albeit painfully. I get hold of the pen. My hands are shaking. My head is still on the headrest. "I shall write my own writing," I groan. My pen slides on paper. Little by little - a letter is written, a word is woven, a sentence is structured and a paragraph is crafted. I do not know how this writing will end

or climax. I am just writing. Writing not because I must write. Writing because I have something to write that I must write. Therefore, I am writing. By the way, I am not writing a play, poem, short story, flash fiction, novel or novella.

This is my own writing - flowing freely from my heart, head, hand and finally falling on paper. As I write, my right hand becomes light. My head is jerked from the headrest to an upright position. My biceps contract and relax involuntarily. I feel fresh warm air fill my lungs. Renewed energy entangles my body. I write, write and write. Will I write forever? As I write, I read what I am writing. As I read what I am writing, I see my fears on paper - I shudder. As I read what I am writing, I smell my fungi infected foot - I laugh at my ignorance. As I read what I am writing, I perceive my pride as well as shame - I fidget. Nonetheless, my pen dances nonstop to the rhythm of write-read. My eyes, running through my writing, are seeing slanting characters. My cocked ears, are listening to the sound of pen waltzing on paper. My sweaty vibrating nose, smells fresh ink on paper. The tip of my thumb, index finger and middle finger, feel the hard pen as the honed edge of my palm caresses the crispy paper. My pen stops spitting ink.

“What the hell!” I curse.

“It is running short of ink,” I realize.

“Where is another pen? I shall write to my grave,” I scream.

“Where is another pen? I shall write to my grave,” I hear the echo of my voice immortalized on paper

This project comes out from our need to harness voices in Africa and Latin America, giving these voices an opportunity to converse, argue, synthesize, agree, and share ideas on the craft of writing, on life, on being and on thinking for the benefit of all. It was also an opportunity to create literary friendships and contacts between these two great regions. Generally, Latin America and Africa still have a lot of stories to share among themselves and with the rest of the world. There are still very strong untapped storytelling traditions in these continents. The stories in this volume are selected from an amazing range of entries to a call for contributions to an anthology on experimentation. It is hoped this robust selection will serve a wide variety of tastes in both Spanish and English, and that the book will open dialogue and the sharing of ideas between the two regions and the whole world. This is an invaluable contribution on many fronts.

TENDAI RINOS MWANAKA is a multidisciplinary artist and writer from Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. Published books include among others, Zimbabwe: The Urgency of Now (creative nonfiction), Finding a Way Home (stories novel), Revolution (poems). He is also a published and exhibited visual artist. He is as well, a sound/musical artist using mostly traditional instrumentation like the mbira.

RICARDO FELIX RODRIGUEZ was born 1975 in Caborca, Sonora, Mexico. He studied psychology and has a Master's degree in social science with emphasis in health. He has written theatre, short stories, essays and film reviews. He has recently published a collection of short stories titled "The surreal adventures of Dr. Mingus".



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